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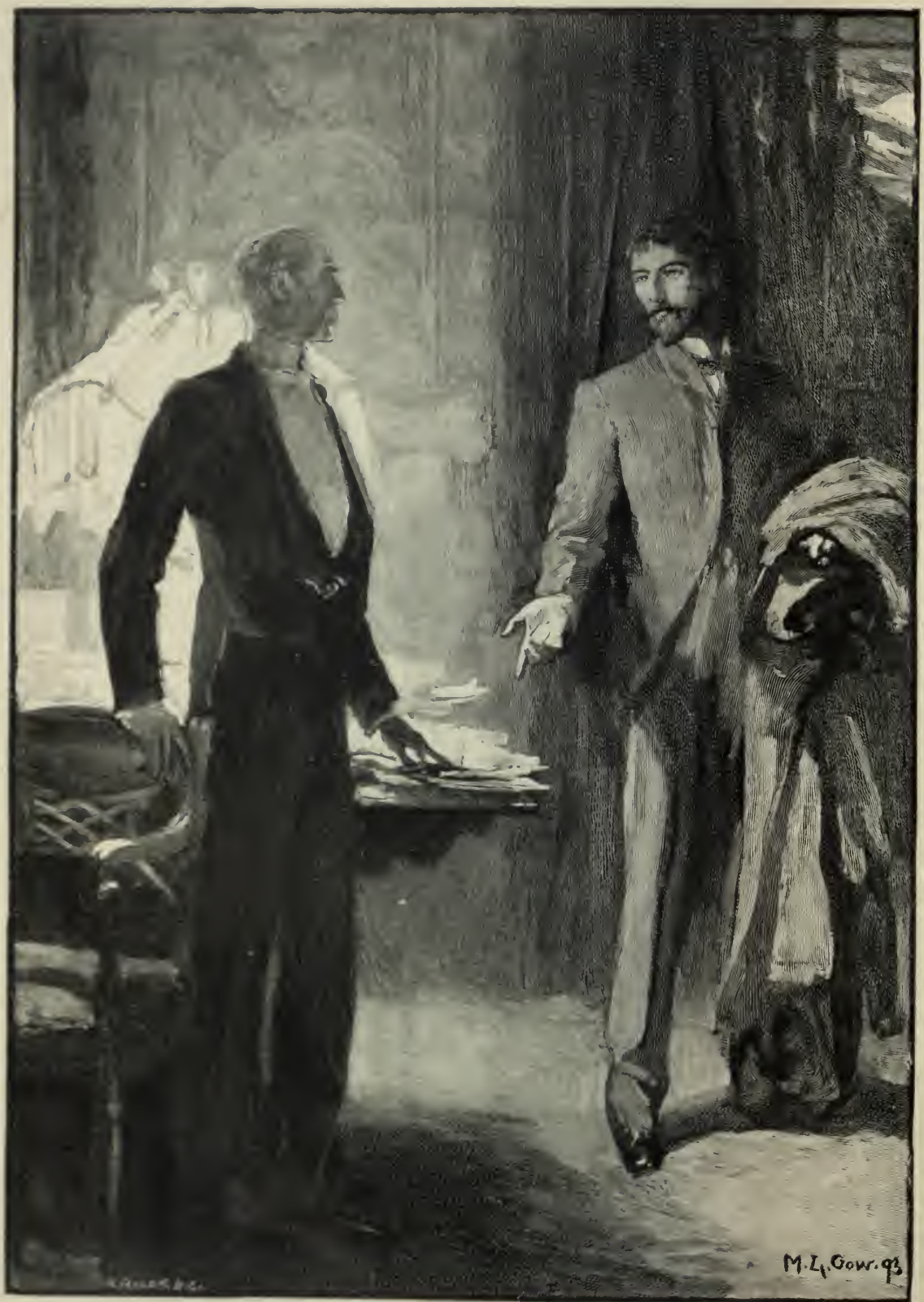

"FATHER, HAVE YOU NO WORD OF FORGIVENESS FOR ME BEFORE I GO?"

"Laden with Golden Grain."

THE

ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

CHARLES W. WOOD.

VOLUME LVII.

January to June, 1894.

RICHARD BENTLEY & SON,
8, NEW BURLINGTON STREET, LONDON, W.
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LONDON:
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

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"'Father, have you no word of forgiveness for me before I go?'"

"Without further preface, Ethel began to read."

"He touched her fingers with his lips as tenderly as if she had been a princess."

"'Am I to presume, madam, that I see before me the widow of my late son, John Alexander Clare?'"

"The housekeeper, with an elaborate curtsey and a thin acid smile, took her leave."

"By the time tea was over, the sisters had discovered that their first and not altogether flattering estimate of Lady Pell was quite an erroneous one."

"Do the bells yet chime o'er that tranquil bay,
As I heard them—it seems—but yesterday?"

Illustrations to "Letters from South Africa."

THE ARGOSY.

JANUARY, 1894.

THE GREY MONK.

By the Author of "The Mysteries of Heron Dyke."

CHAPTER I.

ALEC'S SENTENCE.

IT was a wild and stormy October night. The big moon-faced clock in the entrance-hall, in its slow and solemn fashion, as of a horologe that felt the burden of its years, had just announced the hour of eleven.

In his study alone, busy among his coins and curios, sat Sir Gilbert Clare of Withington Chase, Hertfordshire, and Chase Ridings, Yorkshire, a handsome, well-preserved man, in years somewhere between fifty and sixty. He had a tall, thin, upright figure, strongly marked features of an aquiline type, a snow-white moustache, and an expression at once proud and imperious.

It would, indeed, have been difficult to find a prouder man than Sir Gilbert. He was proud of the long line of his ancestors, of the brave men and beautiful women who, from their faded frames in the picture gallery, seemed to smile approval on the latest representative of their race. He was proud of the unsullied name which had come down to him from them, on which no action of his had ever cast the shadow of a stain. He was proud of the position, which he accepted as his by right, in his native county; he was proud of his three sturdy boys, at this hour wrapped in the sleep of innocent childhood. But his pride was strictly locked up in his own bosom. No syllable ever escaped him which told of its existence. To the world at large, and even to the members of his own household, he was a man of a quick and irascible temper, of cold manners and unsympathetic ways.

Proud as Sir Gilbert had just cause for being, there was one point, and one that could in no wise be ignored, at which his pride was touched severely.

His eldest son and heir was a disappointment and a failure. He had fought against the knowledge as long as it had been

possible for him to do so, but some months had now gone by since the bitter truth had forced itself upon him in a way he could no longer pretend to ignore. He had caused private inquiries to be made, the result of which had satisfied him that, from being simply a good-natured harum-scarum spendthrift, the young man was gradually degenerating into a betting man and a turf gambler of a type especially obnoxious to the fastidious baronet. He told himself that he would almost as soon have had his son become a common pick-pocket.

It never entered his mind to suspect that the evidence of Alec's delinquencies which had been laid before him, and to obtain which he had paid a heavy price, might, to some extent, have been manufactured; that the shadows of the picture might have been purposely darkened in order that he might be supplied with that which he presumably looked for. He had accepted it in full and without question.

It had been Alec's misfortune to get mixed up with a fast set while at college, and he seemed never to have quite broken with them afterwards.

At the Chase he and his stepmother had not got on well together —for the present Lady Clare was the baronet's second wife— and when, shortly after coming of age, he announced his intention of making his home, for a time at least, with some of his mother's relatives in London, Sir Gilbert had offered no opposition to the arrangement, for he was wise enough to recognise that two such opposite dispositions as those of his present wife and his eldest son could not possibly agree.

Then it presently came to his ears that Alec had gone into bachelor quarters of his own, after which came a long course of extravagances and debts of various kinds, such as well-to-do fathers have had to put up with from spendthrift sons for more centuries than history can tell us of.

Twice he had paid Alec's debts and started him afresh with a clean slate; but on the second occasion he had given him plainly to understand that he must look for no further help in that line, but confine himself strictly to the fairly liberal allowance which had been settled on him when he came of age. Despite the determination thus expressed, no very long time had elapsed before a couple of tradesmen's accounts for considerable sums were received by the baronet, with a request for an early liquidation of the same— not, however, sent by Alec, but by the creditors themselves. Instead of returning the bills to their senders, as most parents would have done, with a curt disavowal of all liability, Sir Gilbert chose rather to confiscate his son's allowance to the amount of the debts in question.

From that time, now upwards of half a year ago, there had been no communication of any kind between father and son. Alec, however, was not left wholly without means, he having still an income of a hundred and eighty pounds a year, derivable from funded property left him by his mother.

Sir Gilbert had had an agreeable surprise in the course of the day

with the evening of which we are now concerned, and yet it was a surprise not untinged with sadness.

His old friend Mr. Jopling, like himself an ardent numismatist and collector, had died a few weeks before, much to the baronet's regret. To-day there had reached him a tiny packet, forwarded by Mr. Jopling's executors, containing a couple of rare coins bequeathed him by his dead friend. One of them was a gold stater of Argos, with the head of Hera, the reverse being Diomedes carrying the palladium; while the other was a scarce fifty-shilling piece of Cromwell. Sir Gilbert had long envied his friend the possession of them, and now they were his own; therefore was the feeling with which he regarded them one of mingled pleasure and pain.

He had devoted the evening to a rearrangement of the contents of some of his cases and cabinets and to deciding upon a resting-place for his newly-acquired treasures.

It had been a labour of love. But, for all that, his thoughts every now and again would keep reverting from the pleasant task he had set himself to his eldest son; for this was the latter's birthday, a fact which the father could not forget, although he would fain have kept it in the background of his memory. On just such a wild night twenty-four years before, had John Alexander Clare been born. With what bright hopes, with what glowing expectations he had been welcomed on the stage of life, Sir Gilbert alone could have told. A groan broke involuntarily from his lips when he pictured in thought the difference between then and now. His heart was very bitter against his son.

The night was creeping on apace.

In the great house everybody was in bed save the baronet, who was addicted to solitude and late hours. Outside, at recurring intervals, the wind blew in great stormy gusts, which anon died down to an inarticulate sobbing and wailing, as it might be of some lost spirit wandering round the old mansion, seeking ingress but finding none. There were voices in the wide-mouthed chimney; the rain lashed the windows furiously; by daybreak the trees would be nearly bare and all the woodways be covered by a sodden carpet of fallen leaves. Summer was dead indeed.

Suddenly, in a lull of the gale, Sir Gilbert was startled into the most vivid wakefulness by an unmistakable tapping at one of the two long windows which lighted the room. He listened in rigid silence till the tapping came again. Then he crossed to the window whence the sound had proceeded, and after having drawn back the curtains and unbarred and opened the shutters, he demanded in his sternest tones:

"Who is there?"

"It is I—Alec, your son," came the reply in a well-remembered voice.

Sir Gilbert drew a long breath and paused for a space of half-a-dozen seconds. Then he unhasped and flung wide the window, and John Alexander Clare, the scapegrace heir, rain-soaked and mud-bedraggled, stepped into the room.

His father closed the window after him, while Alec proceeded to relieve himself of his soft broad-brimmed hat and the long cloak which had enveloped him from head to foot.

Like his father, the heir of Withington Chase was tall and slender and as upright as a dart. He had the same aquiline, high-bred cast of features, but in his case there was lacking that expression of hauteur and domineering pride, which to a certain extent marred those of the elder man.

Sir Gilbert's eyes in colour were a cold bluish-grey, and, though not really small, had the appearance of being so owing to their being so deep-set under his heavy brows and to his habit of contracting his lids when addressing himself to anyone. Alec's hazel eyes, inherited from his mother, were large, clear, and open as the day. The baronet's lips under his white moustache were thin and hard-set, and his rare smile was that of a cynic and a man who loved to find food for his sardonic humour in the faults and follies of his fellow-creatures. His son's mouth, if betraying a touch of that weakness which as often as not is the result of an overplus of good-nature, was yet an eminently pleasant one, while his smile was frankness itself. His cheeks were a little more sunken than they ought to have been at his age, and there were dark half-circles under his eyes, which seemed to hint at late hours and mornings that bring a headache. His hair, which he wore short and parted in the middle, was in colour a dark reddish-brown, as were also his short pointed beard and small moustache.

"And to what, sir, am I indebted for the honour of a visit at this untimely hour?" inquired Sir Gilbert in his most freezing accents, as his coldly critical eyes took in his son from head to foot.

Alec coloured for a moment and bit his lip, as if to keep down some rising emotion. Then, in a voice of studied calmness, he said, "Perhaps, sir, I may be permitted to take a seat; for, in point of fact, I am dead tired, and have much to say to you."

The baronet waved his son to a chair, and took another himself some distance away.

"I am here to-night, father, to make a confession."

"I presumed as much the moment I set eyes on you."

"I am afraid you will term it a very disgraceful confession."

"I have not much doubt on that point," responded the baronet grimly. "Disgrace and you seem to have gone hand in hand for a long time past."

"Folly, but not disgrace, father. At the worst——"

The baronet held up his hand. "I am not used to such hair-splitting distinctions. You may call it by what term you like, but, to my way of thinking, it is nothing less than a disgrace when a young man permits himself to contract debts which he has no reasonable prospect—nay, which, in many cases, he has no intention of liquidating. But proceed, sir."

Apparently Alec found it no easy matter to proceed. The story

he had to tell was, without doubt, a sufficiently discreditable one, and such as might well cause him to hesitate before he could summon up sufficient courage to enter on its recital. Put into the fewest possible words it came to this: he had lost heavily over a certain race, and had no means of meeting his liabilities. In three days' time, unless his father would come to his help, he would be posted as a defaulter, which, for a man in his position, meant outlawry and social extinction. He got through his confession somehow, speaking in hard, dry tones, almost as if he were relating an incident which referred to some stranger and in which he had no personal concern. He was leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, his fingers interlocked, and his eyes apparently intent on taking in the pattern of the carpet.

A harsh rasping laugh broke from Sir Gilbert.

"And are you really such an imbecile as to have come all the way to Withington, and on such a night as this, indulging yourself with the hope that I would as much as lift my little finger if by so doing I could avert the disgrace—the infamy—which you have wilfully accumulated on your worthless head? If you laid any such flattering unction to your soul, you can dismiss it at once. There is the window, sir; you can depart by the way you came."

Alec drew himself up, and for the first time looked his father straight in the face with the old clear, unwavering look, which the latter remembered so well in him as a boy.

"You wrong me somewhat, sir," he said, with a bitter smile. "When I ventured to intrude upon you it was without the slightest expectation that, for my sake alone, you would move hand or foot to extricate me from the predicament in which my folly had landed me; but it seemed to me that you might, perhaps, be moved to do so by a consideration of a very different kind."

Sir Gilbert's heavy brows came together.

"I am certainly unaware of any such consideration as the one you speak of. But perhaps you will condescend to enlighten me."

"It has seemed to me, sir, that you might, for the sake of the family good name, do that which you refused to do to save the reputation of your eldest son."

An involuntary "Ah!" escaped the baronet. It was a view of the question which had not struck him before. For a minute or two he sat in frowning silence. Then he said:

"And are yours the lips that dare to put forward a plea for safeguarding that good name which you have so infamously chosen to imperil? Oh, this seems to me the vilest hypocrisy!"

Alec raised his hands with a deprecatory gesture, but did not attempt to vindicate himself by a word. Sir Gilbert rose and crossed to the window by which his son had entered. The shutters had not been replaced, and he stood gazing out into the night for what to Alec seemed a long time. The gale had temporarily abated, torn and

jagged masses of cloud were hurrying across the sky as if hastening to some rendezvous, revealing translucent depths of moonlit space between their severed fringes.

"What is the sum of your liability in connection with this last most discreditable affair?" demanded Sir Gilbert, after a time, without turning his head.

"Six hundred pounds."

Again there was a space of silence.

Then the baronet said:

"If I consent to take this liability on my shoulders, it will not be for your sake—that I hope I have already made sufficiently clear—but to save the name of one of the oldest and most honoured families in the kingdom from being dragged through the mire. But not even for that will I do this thing without exacting certain terms from you in return."

"You have but to name your terms, sir, to secure for them an immediate acceptance."

He rose and crossed to the chimney-piece, and taking up a small ornament, examined it for a moment or two. Then, replacing it, he turned and confronted Sir Gilbert, who had now returned to his seat.

"Father," said Alec, and it was the first time he had uttered the word since his arrival, "although it may seem a hard thing for you to credit, I assure you most solemnly that I shall derive infinitely more pleasure from the fact that the honour of the Clares will suffer no stain through my folly, than from the knowledge that my debt has been paid, and that I shall no longer have to fear being posted as a defaulter."

Then, after a momentary pause, he resumed:

"Without wishing in the least to try to extenuate my criminal folly in your eyes, which I am quite aware would be a useless effort, I may yet be allowed to remark that when I entered upon the transaction which has landed me in my present quagmire, I had every possible assurance a man can have in a matter into which the element of chance at all enters, that, instead of being a loser to the extent of six hundred pounds, I should be in pocket to the amount of three thousand. It was one of those things, which, at the time, seemed to me almost as sure as death. The commonest justice to myself compels me to say as much as that."

He had spoken slowly and quietly, giving its due emphasis to every word, but he might have been addressing himself to a graven image for any notice his father condescended to accord his words.

He now went back to his seat. Sir Gilbert had removed his chair, so that an oblong mahogany table now divided him and his son. Resting his arms on this and leaning forward a little, Alec said:

"And now, sir, will you be good enough to specify the terms which you propose to exact from me?"

"My terms are these," replied Sir Gilbert, in the same tone that

he might have used had he been laying down the conditions of a lease with his land-steward: "You will at once leave England, not to return to it without my express sanction. Further, should you choose to reside on the Continent, it must be in some place out of the ordinary lines of travel, where there will be little likelihood of your being seen or recognised by anyone who has known you in England. In return, I will relieve you of your liabilities of every kind whatsoever, and will, in addition, make you an allowance of two hundred and fifty pounds per annum, which shall be remitted to you quarterly through my solicitor, Mr. Page."

By the time Sir Gilbert had finished speaking, Alec's face had paled perceptibly. He lay back in his chair, and for a few seconds his eyes, wide open though they were, saw nothing of all that was around him. His heart beat painfully; he was as a man afflicted with vertigo.

That his father's conditions would be hard, he—knowing the man—had not doubted, but the reality dumfounded him.

Sir Gilbert was toying with his watch-guard, his eyes apparently fixed on a corner of the ceiling.

"Well, sir, have you nothing to say in answer to my proposition?" at length he asked, bringing his gaze back to his son's face. "Do you agree to my terms, or do you reject them?"

"I have no option but to agree to them. Beggars cannot be choosers." The bitterness at his heart made itself apparent in his words.

"Your last statement embodies a great truth, and one which you would do well to bear in mind for the rest of your life," said the baronet, with the nearest approach to a sneer he ever permitted himself. "It may, perhaps, be as well that I should recapitulate the terms of my proposition in order that there may be no after-mistake in the matter."

When he had done so, he said:

"Do you pledge me your word to carry out the conditions as laid down by me, in their entirety?"

"I pledge you my word to that effect."

Sir Gilbert rose and pushed back his chair.

"In that case, I need not detain you further. You know Page's address. Send him at once a complete list of your liabilities, with all needful particulars to enable him to settle the same. He will receive my instructions in the course of to-morrow to advance you a hundred pounds, or rather, to make you a present of them, as I neither know, nor care to know, how you are off for ready money. As soon as you have decided where to bestow your worthless self, you will write Page to that effect. And now I am not aware that I have anything more to add."

Alec had risen by this time and had picked up his hat and cloak. His eyes sought his father's eyes and met them. They stood confronting each other thus while one might have counted six slowly.

The younger man's gaze was instinct with a grave questioning wistfulness. As plainly as speech could have done, it said:

"Father, have you no word of forgiveness for me before I go?"

But in Sir Gilbert's chilly blue-grey eyes was to be read no faintest response. Had his son been a stranger, whom he had never before set eyes on, he could not have regarded him with more apparent indifference. With a heavy sigh that seemed to choke back a sob, Alec turned, and crossing to the window by which he had entered, opened it. A moment he paused on the threshold, and threw a backward glance over his shoulder.

"Good-bye, father," he said in a voice that was scarcely above a whisper.

"Good-night and good-bye," came the response in accents clear and unmoved.

An instant later and Alec was gone. Sir Gilbert waited till the noise of his son's footsteps on the gravel had died away. Then he crossed to the window and refastened the shutters, and drew again the heavy curtains. So departed from the home of his ancestors the heir of Withington Chase.

By this time the night was fair, but although the wind had spent much of its force, it still blew in fitful gusts. Having crossed the lawn and the flower-garden, Alec leaped the sunken fence which divided the latter from the park, and then turning sharply to the right, presently struck into a footpath, well known to him of old, which wound through the belt of timber that sheltered the Chase from the north and north-east winds. Having traversed this, he emerged into a wilder part of the grounds rarely trodden by anyone save an occasional poacher, or by that law-breaker's implacable foe, the gamekeeper, in the course of his nocturnal rounds.

Alec Clare was returning by the way he had come. He had quitted the London train at Westwood station, four miles away, where there was no one who knew him, rather than go on to Mapleford, the station nearest the Chase, where, even at that late hour, he could not have made sure of not being recognised: and he had his own reasons for wishing to keep his midnight visit a secret from everybody. His intention was to climb the wall at the far corner of the park where it abutted on a narrow lane which, at a distance of a quarter of a mile, opened on to the high road that led direct to Westwood station.

He was plunging forward through the rain-soaked bracken, feeling intolerably sore at heart, wroth with himself, his father and the world at large, but most of all with himself, and the prey to a dull heavy pain, which had its origin in the knowledge that he was leaving behind him the home of his birth, his mother's grave, and all the haunts that were inextricably interwoven with the memories of his boyhood, perhaps never to see them again—when suddenly from behind the bole of a huge elm a man stepped full in his path and barred the way.

Alec fell back a step or two with an involuntary exclamation, so startled was he, and next moment the man did the same. He was a big, burly fellow, dressed in velveteens and gaiters, and carrying a stout cudgel in his right hand.

"Why, lawks-a-me, if it ain't Master Alec!" he exclaimed with a gasp of astonishment; "and just as I'd made sure I was a going to cop one o' them confounded poachers. Well, wonders will never cease. I'm mortal glad to see you, sir, anyhow."

The speaker was Martin Rigg, Sir Gilbert's gamekeeper. Alec and he had been firm allies in days gone by. Many a night had the "young master" and the keeper gone the rounds together when the former was supposed to be sound asleep in bed. Many had been their escapades, even to the extent of doing a little night-poaching on their own account. All that Alec knew of woodcraft, of the "gentle art" and of the haunts and habits of birds and animals, he owed to Martin Rigg.

"Yes, it is I, Martin," replied the young man, now thoroughly roused from his abstraction. "If you took me for a poacher, I, at the first glance, took you for a ghost, or something equally as uncanny."

"For the Grey Monk, perhaps?" suggested the keeper, with a chuckle in his voice.

"You forget that the Grey Monk wears a cowl, and not even by starlight could your wide-awake be mistaken for that."

"Wide-awake or no wide-awake, sir, I've reason to believe that more than one timid servant lass has been ready to take her affidavy that she had seen the Grey Monk, when it's only been me that she's caught sight of in the dark, prowling among the trees, on the look-out for gins and snares."

"By the way," said Alec, but with the tone of one whose mind had far more serious things to occupy it, "has anything been seen of the family spectre of late?"

"No, sir—not of late. It's nigh on for three years since it was seen last, and then it was her ladyship who was nearly frightened out of her wits by it. She was coming downstairs at the time, and had reached the lowermost landing, when she saw the Grey Monk glide across the hall in the moonlight. She shrieked out, and they do say she nearly fainted. The best of it was that up to then she had always made light of the ghost, and said its appearances were nothing more than 'lucinations, whatever they may be. But she never said so after that night. Sir Gilbert was awfully wild when he heard about it, and would fain have hushed it up; but it was too late. However, that's an old wife's tale by this time. As I said afore, sir, I'm mortal glad to see you."

"Not for one moment do I doubt you, old friend. All the same, I am sure you would like to know why I am here and where I am bound for at this hour of the night. Listen! there is the turret clock striking twelve. Well, I will tell you."

He waited till the clock had done striking; then resumed:

"I have just left my father. He and I have said good-bye to each other for a long time to come. I am on my way to Westwood station: you know the near cut. Forty-eight hours hence I shall have left England, to return I know not when."

"I am main sorry to hear that, Master Alec," remarked the keeper in a tone of real concern. In common with everybody connected with the Chase, and a good many people in no wise connected with it—for such things cannot be kept secret—he was cognisant of the breach between Sir Gilbert and his heir, and could form a pretty shrewd guess as to the origin of it.

"And I am no less sorry to have it to tell," replied Alec. "Now, when I tell you further that I don't want anyone to know of my present visit to the Chase, nor to hear from your lips that you have as much as set eyes on me, you will, I am sure, respect my wishes."

"O' course I will, sir. You may make yourself easy on that score. I *dreamt* as I saw you—that's all—and I don't tell my dreams to nobody."

CHAPTER II.

AN OLD FAMILY AND ITS HOME.

WITHINGTON CHASE was a fine old Jacobean mansion, which had been added to from time to time as whim or necessity had dictated.

The walls of the original structure were composed of small red bricks, relieved at frequent intervals, as far as the main frontage was concerned, by fluted pilasters of white stone with Ionic capitals, which, when seen from a little distance, had all the effect of marble. However incongruous and out of keeping with the general scheme of the house the various additions which had been patched on to it during the course of the last two centuries might have seemed when they were crude and new, Time's chastening fingers had mellowed them to a certain degree of beauty, so that in these latter days the general effect was that of a harmonious and homogeneous whole.

Originally there had been a much older mansion, which, after having been partially destroyed by fire, had been razed to the ground, all of it save one sturdy fragment which, for some unknown reason, had been allowed to stand.

This relic of a state of things long vanished was an octagonal tower, about sixty feet in height, built of undressed blocks of grey stone, held together by a mortar as hard as themselves. The interior of the tower consisted of three small rooms, one above the other, with a leaded roof surmounted by a breast-high parapet. Each of the rooms was lighted by a couple of long narrow openings in the wall, which at one time might have been glazed, but were so no longer.

Of these rooms the ground floor one alone was now put to any service, access to the others, owing to the rotten state of the woodwork, being deemed a risk not worth adventuring. The basement in question was used as a receptacle for gardeners' tools, and a general storage place for things horticultural, which had been allowed to accumulate there for years.

As already stated, the tower had formed a part of the older mansion of Withington Chase, although what the intention had been in building it, and to what special purposes it had been put, nobody nowadays seemed to know. There it was, however; and there—the elements being its only enemies—it was likely to remain for some centuries to come. It was about five or six hundred yards apart from the more modern mansion, the space between the two being occupied by the belt of timber before mentioned.

The main entrance to Withington Chase was approached by a broad carriage-drive, which swept with a graceful curve from the lodge some half a mile away. The park was well timbered, and contained a number of grand old trees said to have been planted before the present mansion was in existence. In front of the house, but intersected by the drive, was a spacious expanse of closely-shaven lawn, to the right of which was a small but choicely kept flower-garden, while on its left was a shrubbery of tall clipped hedges and thick clumps of evergreens, among the sheltered paths of which Sir Gilbert found it pleasant to take his constitutional when the weather was too cold and raw to allow of his walking elsewhere in the open air.

The master of Withington Chase was proud of his long descent, and that not without reason.

He could trace back his pedigree on the male side in unbroken sequence to the time of Henry IV. One head of the family had fought at Agincourt, another had distinguished himself at Malplaquet; while scions of the family, more than one could count on one's fingers, had fought and, in several cases, died for their king and country wherever the British flag had penetrated. Quite a number of Clares had been in Parliament from time to time, and if none of them had been noted for his eloquence, or had risen to office, they had all possessed the negative virtue of being staunch voters, men whose political opinions could be relied upon never to stray beyond the hard and fast lines laid down by their own party.

The present baronet had taken no share in public affairs, and had declined more than once to allow himself to be nominated for a seat in Parliament. An occasional appearance on the magisterial bench, which grew still more occasional with advancing years, just sufficed to remind his brother justices and the good folk of Mapleford, that Sir Gilbert Clare of Withington Chase had not yet been gathered to his ancestors in the family vault.

Sir Gilbert, at the age of five-and-twenty, had inherited an impoverished estate, and, by consequence, a diminished revenue.

His father had been a man of fashion and a gamester, under the Regency, and in the course of a few years of reckless expenditure had contrived to undo the work of several generations of thrifty progenitors. This was a state of things which the young baronet at once set himself to remedy. The town house and its contents were sold to the highest bidder; the Yorkshire property was let on lease to a wealthy manufacturer; while the Withington establishment was cut down to the lowest limits compatible with keeping up his station in the county.

Unfortunately for his worldly prospects—and he was the first to admit the fact later on—Sir Gilbert had married about a year prior to his father's death, and, little likely as one would have deemed him, with his cold temperament, to commit such an imprudence, had married for love. His bride had come of a good family, but beyond a trifling dowry of a few thousand pounds, had had nothing save a pretty face, and a piquant manner to recommend her. Such as she was, however, she had contrived to fascinate the haughty young heir of Withington Chase.

Alas! that it should have to be told, but in the course of a few brief years after marriage the pretty face had become a memory of the past, and the piquant manner had degenerated into the querulous repinings of a semi-invalid; for Lady Clare was one of those women who find in a naturally delicate constitution an ample excuse for shirking all the active duties of life, and for coddling themselves into a state of chronic invalidism, the chief features of which, in her case, seemed to be reclining the day through on a couch, and being waited on, hand and foot, by everyone about her.

Under these circumstances it was scarcely to be wondered at that, after a time, Sir Gilbert's home-life became intolerable to him. He was by nature of a restless disposition, with a strong inclination for travel and adventure, and by degrees his absences from the Chase grew longer, till at length it came to pass that he would be away for several months at a time.

It was during one of these absences that his wife died, greatly to his surprise and relief. She had so coddled herself up for years, and had made of herself such a hot-house plant, that a slight chill, too trivial in the first instance to seem worth notice, had sufficed to carry her off. She left behind her a son ten years old, the John Alexander Clare to whom we have already been introduced.

Whatever might have been Lady Clare's defects in other ways, she had passionately loved her child.

Unfortunately, however, not content with loving him, she had done her best to spoil him. This, Sir Gilbert's frequent absences had allowed her ample opportunities for doing. When he was at the Chase it was tacitly understood between mother and son that matters were on a different footing. At such times her ladyship curbed, in some measure, the display of her affection, and Alec left

off bird-nesting and consorting with Martin Rigg, and attended assiduously at the rectory, where the Rev. Bruce Amor was doing his best to ground him in the humanities.

With his mother's death everything was changed for Alec.

Whether Sir Gilbert had all along been aware of the way in which his son was being spoiled, but had his own reasons for ignoring the fact, or whether some meddler had made it his business to enlighten him, the result was the same as far as the boy was concerned. In place of good, easy-going Mr. Amor, he was now put under the charge of a tutor whose reputation as a martinet had been his chief qualification in the eyes of the baronet. Mr. Duggan's instructions were to prepare the lad for a public school and in the meantime, as Sir Gilbert expressed it, to "break him in."

And now for Alec began an experience which was all the harder to bear by reason of what had gone before.

The new tutor was like a baleful shadow which dogged him wherever he went. From the time he rose till the time he went to bed he could never get rid of him for more than a few minutes at a time. It was a tyranny which at length became almost unbearable and went far towards breaking the lad's all but indomitable spirit.

One day, when he had been only a few weeks at the Chase, Mr. Duggan, with the view, perhaps, of keeping up his reputation as a martinet, chose, by way of punishment for some trifling fault, to administer a sound caning to his pupil. The lad took his punishment without a murmur, but half an hour later, he was missing; nor, when search came to be made, was he anywhere to be found.

Alec, however, was no great distance away.

Being nearly as active as a squirrel, he had climbed the bole of one of the big old trees in the park, and there, for two days and nights—the month being June—he lay perdu in his leafy shelter, being supplied with food meanwhile by Martin Rigg, who was the only person in the secret of his hiding-place. It was only his father's threat, conveyed to him by that faithful servitor, to send for Captain Darville's bloodhounds and so track him down, that induced him to give himself up.

For this freak he was sentenced to a week of bread-and-water in a darkened room. Even so, he was not left wholly forlorn, food and candles and books being surreptitiously conveyed to him from the servants' hall. But Mr. Duggan never laid hands on him again.

In due course this period of his life came to an end, and it was with something of the feeling of a captive released after a long imprisonment that he one day found himself on his way to Harrow, from which place, in the natural sequence of things, he proceeded to Cambridge.

All his life Alec had stood in awe of his father. It was a feeling which, to some extent, had been fostered by his mother. To both of them it had been as a load lifted off their lives when the baronet left

home on one of his excursions, and both had looked forward with dread to his return. There had been no cordiality, no sympathy, no *rapprochement* in any proper sense of the word, between father and son.

That, however, had been owing to no fault on the boy's part, for Alec's was one of those bright, open dispositions which respond readily to whatever kindly influences may be brought to bear on them. But Sir Gilbert had no liking for children, or young people, and it was not in his nature to make any exception even in the case of his own son. He had kept himself aloof from him from the first, and with the lapse of years the silent, passive breach between the two, if such it could be termed, grew gradually wider and more impossible of being bridged over. Many an hour's heartache had the boy, more especially after his mother's death, but there was too large a tincture of family pride in his composition to allow of even an inkling of what he felt to be visible on the surface. More than once in after-life he said bitterly to himself: "If, when I was young, my father had treated me as other fathers treat their sons, I should have been a different man from what I am now."

That might, or might not, have been the case.

It was while Alec was at Harrow that Sir Gilbert married again.

There was no question of sentiment mixed up with his second matrimonial venture, as there had been with his first. It was the simple fact of Miss Delmayne being possessed of a fortune of sixty thousand pounds in her own right that led him to propose to her.

On her part, the lady, who had seen thirty summers, had no illusions. She was perfectly aware for what reason she was being sought, but, all the same, it seemed to her that she would have been very foolish to let slip the chance of becoming Lady Clare, of Withington Chase.

She was a capable, managing woman, who allowed her husband to go and come and do just as he liked, without any repining or questioning on her part—a mode of procedure which just suited the baronet. On the other hand, she tolerated no interference in domestic matters, or the indoor management of the Chase. It may be accounted as a virtue in her that she was no more inclined for an extravagant style of living than was her husband. Still more did this become the case after her three sons were born; indeed, for the sake of their future she began after a time to develop a disposition which, in a person of her social position, might almost be termed penurious.

Lady Clare's special grievance, and it was one which debarred her from seeking the sympathy of others—the one thorn in her pillow—was the existence of her husband's eldest son.

In that particular, if in no other, it seemed to her that Providence had dealt hardly with her. No such person ought to have been born; or, if that could not have been avoided, his sojourn in this vale of tears should have been of the briefest. To her it seemed a

monstrous thing that anyone other than her own darling Randolph should be the legal heir to his father's title and estates. More especially hard did it seem to her in view of the fact that a third of the dowry she had brought her husband had gone to clear off certain old mortgages contracted by the preceding baronet, and in so far, might be said to have benefited the estate in perpetuity.

Yet, in the face of this, Randolph, at his father's death, would only be entitled to a younger son's share of the baronet's savings—provided there should be any to divide—both the Hertfordshire and the Yorkshire estates being strictly entailed. Her ladyship felt that she had indeed just cause for repining.

She was coldly gracious to Alec, whenever that young man made his appearance at the Chase, which, as time went on, became less frequently than ever. He felt that he was not wanted at home, that he had now become less to his father even than he had been before, and he knew that his instincts did not deceive him when they told him that in her ladyship he had an enemy whom no efforts on his part would avail to conciliate.

It was as well, perhaps, for more reasons than one, that Lady Clare had no knowledge of the considerable sums disbursed by the baronet from time to time in liquidation of the debts contracted by his spendthrift heir. In those matters Mr. Page, the family solicitor, was the only person taken into Sir Gilbert's confidence. It was a source of gratification to her ladyship to know that father and son lived on permanently bad terms with each other; and when, after that October night which saw the heir banished from home, her husband told her that Alec had gone abroad, and that they were not likely to be troubled with him or his affairs again for a long time to come, she sincerely rejoiced. Alec was wild and careless of his health, and reckless in many ways. There was no knowing what might come to pass. It no longer seemed to her the foolish day-dream she had deemed it heretofore, that she might, perhaps, live to hear her son addressed as Sir Randolph Clare of Withington Chase.

It was well for her ladyship, as it is for all of us, that there was no invisible hand to draw aside the curtain of the future and reveal to her even a glimpse of what was to be.

Meanwhile, the real heir had unaccountably vanished from the haunts which had known him, and was as one dead to that little world in which he had been such a familiar figure. No word of him, or message of any kind reached his whilom associates. A vague rumour got spread about, originating no one seemed to know how or whence, that he had joined a certain exploring expedition which just then was being a good deal talked about; but it was a rumour which was never confirmed.

Men talked and wondered for a little while, and then presently he was forgotten.

CHAPTER III.

ALEC'S PROPOSITION.

With the inmates of Withington Chase two uneventful years glided imperceptibly away. Between Sir Gilbert and his wife the name of the proscribed heir was never mentioned; to all seeming he had vanished out of their lives as completely as if he had never existed. That his image still dwelt more or less in his father's thoughts was only in the natural order of things, but to faithful Mr. Page alone, from whom the baronet had few or no secrets, did Alec's name ever cross his lips, and to him no oftener than was unavoidable.

The lawyer had duly remitted his quarterly allowance to the young man, forwarding it now to one obscure continental town and now to another, in accordance with Alec's written request; but, beyond that, nothing whatever was known of him or his whereabouts.

Then one day the baronet received a letter from his son, dated from Catanzaro, a small out-of-the-way town in southern Italy.

In it the writer stated that he was utterly tired of the idle, purposeless life he had been leading for the past two years, and that if his father would agree to give him six thousand pounds down, he would emigrate to the United States and never trouble him for another shilling as long as he lived. But he would do more, much more, than that, should his father consent to his proposition. In that case he would agree to the cutting off of the entail and would sign whatever documents might be needful for the due carrying out of that design. Sir Gilbert sat staring at the letter after he had finished reading it like a man whose faculties had been paralysed by sheer amazement.

So absorbed was his attention that he was unconscious of the door behind him being opened and of the entry of his wife. Her footfalls made no noise on the thick carpet. She went up behind him and was on the point of placing a hand on his shoulder, when her gaze was attracted to the letter which lay spread open on the writing-table in front of him.

Lady Clare was more than a score of years younger than her husband and her eyesight was still as keen as ever it had been. Half-a-dozen seconds sufficed her to take in the sense of Alec's letter, the handwriting of which she had at once recognised. A little gasp escaped her before she knew it. An instant later the baronet had started to his feet, and was confronting her with flaming eyes; involuntarily his hand closed over the letter.

"Madam, I am not in the habit of being startled in this way," he said, "nor do I like it."

"On the contrary, dear, it was you who startled me," she replied in her blandest accents, with a hand pressed to her left side. "Of course I naturally supposed that you had heard the door opened and

shut, and was on the point of addressing you when you started up as if you had been shot."

"Humph! I have had occasion before to-day to beg of you not to be quite so feline in your movements," he answered with something like a snarl. "Did you—did you read any portion of the letter that was on the table in front of me?"

"My dear Gilbert, what *do* you take me for! That there *was* a letter there, I am aware, but as for reading as much as a line of it——"

"There, there, that will do. Just ring the bell, will you, and then tell me what you want to see me about."

When the servant came in response to the summons, he said: "Tell Graves to bring the dogcart round at once."

Ten minutes later saw Sir Gilbert on his way to Mapleford with his son's letter in his pocket. In such a contingency he felt that he could not do better than seek the advice of his valued counsellor.

Mr. Page, a tall, lanky, somewhat loose-jointed man, with a long thin face, a prominent nose and an expression that was a curious compound of hard common sense, shrewdness and good-nature, gave vent to a low whistle when he had come to the end of Alec's epistle.

"What an exceedingly foolish young man!" were his first words.

"Why so, pray—why so?" demanded the baronet with a lifting of his eyebrows.

"To offer to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage—for that is what he here proposes to do."

"Six thousand pounds is a large sum, Page."

"In itself it may perhaps seem so, but what is it in comparison with the reversion of Withington Chase and the other entailed property? Why, it's not equivalent to one year's rent-roll! A very foolish young man!"

"It is to be presumed that he knows his own business best," remarked the baronet drily. "Besides, you seem to forget the many hundreds of pounds—nay, I may say thousands—that I have had to disburse at different times by reason of his extravagance."

The lawyer shook his head.

"There's more under the surface, I feel convinced, than either you or I yet know of." Then, after a pause, during which he seemed lost in thought, he added, "I should not be in the least surprised if a woman were at the bottom of this business."

The baronet was startled.

"That is a possibility which did not suggest itself to me," he said. "It would, indeed, be just like Alec to finish up his career by contracting a low marriage." Then with a shrug he added: "But he can please himself about that when once the proposition embodied by him in his letter has been duly carried into effect."

"Then you really mean to accept his offer to cut off the entail?"

"I do. If I had any hesitation before, your last suggestion would have effectually disposed of it. I am certainly inclined to believe that you have hit upon the real reason which underlies his offer. Well, I am glad he has sufficient sense and good-feeling left to betake himself to a country where there's not a creature who knows him. In that case a *mésalliance* on his part will be a matter of very minor consequence. And now let us consider by what means we can most readily lay our hands on six thousand pounds."

A week later Sir Gilbert and Mr. Page set out for Italy.

It had never been the baronet's practice to take his wife into his confidence about matters which, from his point of view, did not concern her, consequently he had kept his own counsel as far as Alec's letter and its contents were concerned. It would be time enough to tell her after the all-important document should have been signed by which Alec renounced his birthright. He began to regard young Randolph, the present Lady Clare's eldest son, with very different eyes from those with which he had hitherto looked upon the boy. A few more days and *he* would be the heir of Withington. The pity of it was that the title could not descend to him as well as the estates. That was a point as to which the law was manifestly to blame.

Lady Clare betrayed not the slightest interest as to the nature of the business which was taking her husband and Mr. Page all the way to Italy. So well did she play her part that no faintest suspicion entered Sir Gilbert's mind that she had any knowledge of the existence of Alec's letter, much less of the nature of its contents. She judged, and rightly, that her husband would not have been at the trouble to go to Italy and take his lawyer with him, unless he had agreed to accept the terms proposed by his eldest son. After all, then, the one great grievance of her life would cease to exist, and her darling Randolph would become his father's heir, as he ought to have been all along! Only herself knew with what eager anxiety she awaited her husband's return. Surely, surely, he would not be so cruel as to keep the good news from her an hour after it should be his to tell! He could not fail to know how happy it would make her.

The theory propounded by Mr. Page as to the motive which lay at the foundation of Alec's letter to his father, was not very wide of the mark. Had it not been for a certain pair of brilliant black eyes, in all probability it would never have been written.

About six months before, in the course of his aimless wanderings Alec had found himself and his very limited luggage at Catanzaro, a small but romantically situated Calabrian town, a few miles inland from the Gulf of Squillace.

The place had pleased him and he had made up his mind to stay there awhile.

He had accordingly taken up his quarters at the principal *osteria*, kept by one Giuseppe Rispani. Alec lived very simply, and, of late, had learnt to confine his wants within narrow limits, so that his

father's allowance, conjointly with his own income of one hundred and eighty pounds a year, amply sufficed for all his needs.

Rispani was a widower with one son, who had lately left home for England in the hope of bettering his fortunes, and one daughter, Giovanna by name, at that time a beautiful girl of nineteen.

Rispani's wife had been an Englishwoman, whom he had married for the sake of her little fortune of five hundred pounds, while she had married him for his *beaux yeaux;* for in early life the Italian had been a very handsome man, with a soft tongue and a persuasive manner which poor Miss Verinder had found it impossible to resist.

The Signora Rispani, who at one time had been a governess, and, later on, companion to a lady of rank, was a woman of considerable education and refinement. She took great pains with the tuition and bringing up of her daughter, and to her mother Giovanna owed it that she was almost as familiar with the English tongue as the Italian.

Unfortunately the Signora died when Giovanna was about thirteen years old, just the age when a mother's care and watchfulness were most needed, for the girl's disposition, like her father's, was cold, calculating, and avaricious; and when the one person was gone whose untiring effort it had been to keep down the weeds of selfishness and greed of which her nature was so prolific—for the Signora had by no means been blind to her daughter's defects—it was not difficult to foretell what the result would be.

If Giuseppe Rispani had known anything of the doctrine of heredity, he might have pointed to his daughter as a living example of it as far as the reproduction in her of certain of his own most predominant qualities was concerned.

In appearance Giovanna was a true daughter of the sunny South.

Her figure was tall, with a certain stateliness of carriage that became her well. Her complexion was of the clearest and most transparent olive, her eyes and hair as black as midnight, while her features were almost classic in the regularity of their outlines. In any country in the world Giovanna Rispani would have been accounted a very beautiful young woman.

Vanna had not reached the age of nineteen without having had several suitors, eligible and otherwise, for her hand, but to one and all she had turned a deaf ear. Her father had in no wise tried to influence her choice, being, indeed, firmly persuaded in his own mind that it would have been futile to attempt to do so; but had merely laughed pleasantly as each baffled aspirant went his way, and remarked that Vanna had plenty of time before her in which to make up her mind.

Alec Clare had not been many days an inmate of the *osteria* of the Golden Fig before it became clear to Vanna Rispani, that in the tall, handsome young Englishman, she had achieved another conquest.

Vanna had never made a practice of waiting on her father's guests,

holding herself, indeed, somewhat haughtily aloof, but she condescended to wait on Alec. It was not his looks that attracted her, but the fact that in him she found some one who could talk to her in her mother's native tongue.

She was proud of her ability to speak English, but it was an acquisition which had been in some danger of becoming rusty from disuse; now, however, a day rarely passed without she and Alec having at least one long talk together. To him, too, who had lived for the last two years among what might be termed the byeways of life, it was an inexpressible pleasure to have lighted on some one with whom he could converse in his own tongue; for although by this time he could speak Italian almost as fluently as a native, his thoughts and self-communings were all couched in the language to which he had been born.

Giovanna was wholly free from self-consciousness and *mauvaise honte*; she was as self-possessed as a woman twice her age; consequently there was a charming ease and naturalness in her intercourse with Alec, which he found increasingly fascinating as time went on.

It was surprising what a number of things they found to talk about, and how naturally one subject seemed to lead up to another. If sometimes Alec's talk went a little over the girl's head, if he now and then started a subject which for her was devoid of interest, she was careful not to betray the fact. She might be secretly bored, but her lips never lost their smile, nor her eyes their sparkle.

The heir of Withington Chase lingered on week after week in the little Italian town till a couple of months had gone by, without caring to ask himself why he did so.

At length the time came when he had neither the power nor the will to tear himself away. Self-deception was a species of weakness in which he had never indulged; he had always dealt frankly with himself, and he did so now. He was in love with the innkeeper's daughter, and he admitted it. More than once, in years gone by, his fancy had been taken captive, but in every case the day had come, and that after no long time, when he had snapped the silken thread that loosely held him, and had gone on his way again, heart whole and fancy free.

But it was no frail silken chain that held him now: he was a helpless captive bound hand and foot in Love's golden fetters.

When, however, he asked himself what prospect there was of his passion being reciprocated, he could but reply that he had no grounds whatever for answering the question in his own favour. That Vanna sought his society and that she derived a certain amount of pleasure from it, could not be doubted; but, on the other hand, every one of those signs was wanting which are supposed to foreshadow the dawn of love in a young girl's heart. She was as easy and unembarrassed in his company as in that of her father, which, of itself, seemed to indi-

cate the absence of any special regard for him. And yet there were times when an inscrutable something glanced at him for a moment out of the depths of her magnificent eyes and kindled a sudden flame of hope in his heart, which, if it quickly died down again, left behind it a certain glow less evanescent than itself.

At length a time arrived when it became clear to Alec that matters between himself and Vanna could not go on much longer as they were. The state of uncertainty in which he lived was fast becoming intolerable to him. Not much longer could he keep silent. He would give words to the passion that was consuming him and win all or lose all by the result.

On more than one occasion in the course of their many talks together, Giovanna had so far opened her mind as to confide to Alec the longing which beset her to get away from the dull and narrow routine of her life in her native town. She wanted to see something of the world, to live a larger and freer existence in some country beyond the sea.

Probably it was owing to the influence of these talks that the inception of the scheme was due which, a few weeks later, Alec embodied in his letter to his father.

Should the latter prove willing to give him the sum he had specified, he would ask Giovanna to become his wife, and if she consented, he would seek with her a home in the New World, where his six thousand pounds would, he confidently hoped, prove the corner-stone from which to build up one of those colossal fortunes in comparison with which the revenues of Withington Chase would seem insignificant indeed. In any case, as he truthfully stated in his letter, he was heartily sick of the idle, purposeless existence he had been leading for a couple of years. For aught he knew to the contrary, his father might never revoke the promise extracted from him not to return to England till leave should be given him to do so

Meanwhile his life was slowly rusting away.

CHAPTER IV.

AN OFFER AND ITS ACCEPTANCE.

Sir Gilbert Clare and Mr. Page reached Catanzaro in due course. They were met by Alec, who had been apprised by the lawyer of the time when they might be expected to arrive, and who had secured rooms for them at the Golden Fig, the *osteria* at which he himself had been a guest for so long a time.

Father and son greeted each other with a grave silent bow. Alec flushed to the roots of his hair as soon as he realized that it was Sir Gilbert's intention to treat him as a stranger; then as suddenly he turned pale. Next moment his pride came to his aid. He drew

himself up, and turning courteously to Mr. Page, expressed to him his fear that he must have found the journey both tedious and fatiguing.

At dinner, which had been ordered by Alec beforehand, the two arrivals were waited upon by Rispani in person. This also was by arrangement with Alec, who, for some reason which he could not have defined to himself, was desirous that, for the time being, Giovanna should keep in the background.

It is to be borne in mind that Rispani had no suspicion, either then or afterwards, that the English "Milor" was Alec's father, or, indeed, any relation whatever of the young man. Ever since he had come abroad, young Clare had dropped his surname and had simply been known as "Mr. John Alexander," a cognomen which his Italian friends, to whom the English syllables seemed a concatenation of barbarous sounds, had not failed to naturalise into "Il Signor Alessandro."

Both Sir Gilbert and Mr. Page retired at an early hour.

The lawyer, who despite Alec's failings, had a very genuine liking for him, would fain have secured half an hour's private talk with the young man, but there was no possibility of such a thing till the baronet had sought his own room, and then Alec was nowhere to be found. He had gone for a long solitary walk, and there was no knowing when he would be back. The hour of ten next morning had already been named as that which was to see the important business entered upon which had brought the two Englishmen so far from home.

Mr. Page had not failed to come prepared with the legal document to which, in the presence of the requisite witnesses, the heir would be required to affix that signature which would leave him an heir no longer.

The lawyer had anticipated some difficulty in obtaining a couple of witnesses in that out-of-the-way spot with sufficient knowledge of English to comprehend what was required of them, but it proved to be a difficulty that was readily overcome with the help of Alec. In Giuseppe Rispani and a friend of his who at one time had filled the position of *courrier de place*, were found precisely the two people needed.

No sooner was breakfast over than word was sent to Alec that everything was in readiness. Then he and the witnesses proceeded upstairs to the *sala* which had been set aside for the use of the *forestieri*. A slight haughty inclination of the head was the sole greeting vouchsafed them by Sir Gilbert as they entered the room.

It may be here remarked that Alec had neither dined nor breakfasted with his father. Time had availed nothing to soften the latter's hostility towards his eldest son.

The baronet's chair was apart near the window. On a table in the middle of the room were pens and ink, together with a formidable looking document.

Mr. Page, having shaken hands with Alec, greeted the two

Italians in his most urbane manner, and then motioned them to a couple of chairs on the opposite side of the table. Next he handed the paper to Alec, who sat down on the third chair while he glanced over its various clauses, the lawyer standing at his elbow while he did so. That done, without a moment's hesitation, Alec dipped a pen in the ink and wrote his name in full at the foot in bold flowing characters. He then made way for the witnesses, standing aside with folded arms. At Mr. Page's invitation, Rispani moved to the chair vacated by Alec and proceeded to scrawl his signature on the line indicated by the lawyer's finger. A like process was then gone through by the second Italian. Neither of them had the least notion as to the contents of the document to which they had appended their signatures. Mr. Page had taken care of that. A sheet of blotting-paper which he had applied to Alec's signature was left so as to cover three-fourths of the paper, while the sleeve of his coat, as he indicated the spot where each witness was to write his name, effectually hid the last of the three words, "John Alexander Clare."

He had not lost sight of the fact that in Catanzaro Alec was known only as the Signor Alessandro.

As soon as the Italians were gone Mr. Page sat down, and from the breast pocket of his coat produced a bulky packet of bank notes of various denominations, which, with the help of a moistened fore-finger, he proceeded to count with methodical deliberation.

Having satisfied himself on a point about which he had felt perfectly sure beforehand, he pushed the notes across the table to Alec.

"There, sir," he said; "if you will be at the trouble of counting them, you will find that they amount in the aggregate to exactly six thousand pounds."

"I will take your word for that, Mr. Page," replied Alec, with a bitter smile as he crumpled up the notes and thrust them into his pocket.

By this a carriage, previously ordered, was at the door. The two gentlemen had arranged to post as far as Reggio. Sir Gilbert, who despite his husk of frigidity, was far from comfortable in his mind, and was especially desirous of getting away at the earliest possible moment, had already drawn on his gloves and taken possession of his dust-coat and umbrella. He now extended his rigid fingers to his son, whose hand instinctively closed over them, but without any consciousness of the slightest pressure in return.

"Good-bye," said the baronet. "You have my best wishes for your prosperity in the future. At any time it will gratify me to hear that you are doing well. Now, Mr. Page, if you are ready."

With that the fingers were withdrawn, and turning on his heel, he stalked solemnly out, leaving his son, who had said no word in reply, standing in the middle of the room.

Next moment Mr. Page was wringing Alec's hand.

"Good-bye, my dear boy, and may Heaven bless and prosper you

exclaimed the lawyer, with an unwonted tremor in his voice. "Never forget that in Cornelius Page you have a firm friend; and don't fail to advise me from time to time of your whereabouts."

Three minutes later, as one in a dream, Alec heard the crack of the driver's whip and the rattle of the carriage as it jolted over the narrow paved street. Then when the last sound had died away, his manhood suddenly broke down. Sinking into a chair, with his elbows resting on the table and his face covered with his hands, he let the tears drop silently between his fingers.

Now it so happened that there was one feature about the *osteria* of the Golden Fig, which, for various reasons, it is to be hoped is by no means common to similar houses of entertainment either in Italy or elsewhere.

The peculiarity in question was neither more nor less than a peep-hole, or place of espial, behind one corner of the elaborate plaster scroll-work of fruit and foliage which ran round the ceiling of the room in which the scene related above had taken place. This spy-hole was reached by means of a flight of steps shut up from ordinary view in what looked like a tall clothes closet in the adjoining chamber.

The house was an old one, and what purpose this secret place of observation had originally served it was now impossible to tell. Rispani had found it there when he took the house, and on more than one occasion had taken advantage of it to pry into the doings of his guests; but never to such good purpose as to-day, for from that coign of vantage he had been an unseen witness of the transfer of the roll of notes to Signor Alessandro.

Immediately after the departure of the Englishman Rispani sought his daughter.

"The Signor Alessandro loves thee—is it not so?" he said to her in Italian. There was something in his tone which convinced Vanna that he had a special motive in putting the question.

"His eyes have told me that he loves me, but his words never."

"Thou lovest him in return?"

"I like him—yes; better than I like any one. But as for loving him—no."

"Should he ask thee to wed him, what will thy answer be?"

"It will be time enough to decide that when he *has* asked me."

"He *will* ask thee—I feel sure of it—and thy answer must be yes—yes—yes!"

Vanna's dark orbs looked the surprise she felt.

"Listen," resumed Rispani, laying a hand on her arm and speaking into her ear. "One of the strangers who have just gone gave the Signor Alessandro bank-notes to the value of six thousand pounds English money. These eyes saw him do it. Think! Six thousand pounds!"

Father and daughter looked meaningly at each other. In the eyes of both sparkled the same cold avaricious gleam. At that moment the likeness between them was almost startling.

Giuseppe Rispani had prophesied rightly. At the hour of sunset Alec Clare sought Giovanna and found her where she sat under the grape trellis in the far garden. Nowhere could there have been a spot more suitable for the purpose he had in view. Vanna might have had a prevision that he would look for her there.

Alec had dreaded lest, when the crucial moment should have come, his tongue would fail him and that he should find himself the prey of a silence, at once painful and absurd. But no such mishap befell him.

How the declaration brought itself about he could hardly have told afterwards; all he knew was that he found it surprisingly easy and simple to give utterance to what he wanted to say. But it may have been that Vanna smoothed the way for him after a fashion which, in his preoccupation, he was scarcely conscious of. In any case, he spoke with an ardour and a manly earnestness which did not fail to carry conviction to his listener's heart. It was impossible to doubt his sincerity.

Vanna had already been made love to by more than one impulsive Italian, but she now discovered that this Englishman, ordinarily so undemonstrative and phlegmatic, could, the occasion being given him, rise to a height of passionate fervour which transformed him for the time being into a veritable son of the sunny South. Taking both the girl's unresisting hands in his, and devouring her with his eyes, he ended with the words, "Giovanna, will you be mine?"

No faintest tinge of superadded emotion flushed the clear olive of Vanna's cheek, but the heavy fringes of her eyelids lifted and the midnight orbs behind them gave back Alec look for look.

Then the full ripe lips curved into a siren-like smile, the cool brown fingers softly returned her lover's clasp, and in a whisper came the words:

"I will be yours."

(*To be continued.*)

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF SIR WALTER SCOTT.

SIR WALTER SCOTT passed from this world on the 21st of September, 1832; and therefore in the present year of grace, 1893, it is probable that very few persons still survive who can have known him personally—possibly the present writer may be almost the last yet living who had that privilege—and for this reason, a few reminiscences which can only date from a period of early childhood, may now have a certain value which they would not otherwise have possessed.

I was just eleven years old, on the memorable day of gloom and sorrow to our household, when I heard how my father, always previously a strong robust man, had fallen down in a fainting fit, by the side of that open grave at Dryburgh in which his dearest and most intimate friend was about to be laid, and hid for ever from his sight. But during all the years that I had lived up to that time, Sir Walter had been a most familiar presence in our house, and my recollections of his appearance, his voice, his manner, and many little incidents of personal intercourse with him—young as I was—are as vivid at this date, as if only a few years instead of more than half a century had elapsed since then.

It is not wonderful that it should be so, for the faithful life-long friendship which subsisted between him and my father, led him to look upon our house as a second home, and to treat his friend's children with as much loving and playful familiarity as if they had been his own.

One picture of him as he was then, stands out from the many occasions on which I saw him, with peculiar distinctness in my memory; and it is somewhat singular that it should do so, as I gather from subsequent records that the day when the apparently trivial circumstance occurred, was probably one which had a sad significance I could not have understood at the time.

I was sitting with my sisters, in the public gardens, when we saw Sir Walter coming towards us down a steep walk to the right. I can see him now—the tall old man seeming big and heavy to my childish eyes, with grey hair scarcely seen under the hat which he wore low on his forehead; his arm linked in my father's, on whom he leant strongly, while on the other side he was supported by a huge knotted stick, cut, I imagine, by himself in the woods at Abbotsford. His pleasant benevolent face looks in my recollection unusually grave and sad that day, but when he saw us children, it was lit up instantly with the bright smile we knew so well, and he came forward to greet us with all his accustomed cordiality and kindness.

I think we must have been both surprised and aggrieved that my father dismissed us quickly, and we were only allowed to interchange a very few words with the friend who was so dear to us; but we must in truth have been much out of place, if the day was that of which he speaks in his journal when he says, "Walked in Princes Street pleasure grounds with good Samaritan, James S——, the only one among my numerous friends who can properly be termed *amicus curarum mearum*;" and to which years afterwards he alluded when he wrote: "I visited some remote garden grounds, where I had not been

since I walked there with good Samaritan S—— sadly enough at the time of my misfortunes."

It was but six days after the fatal news of his grievous pecuniary losses had reached him. Of that mournful period, however, I have a recollection full of much greater interest to myself.

Sir Walter had dined with my parents, and been in the highest spirits, on the very evening when the announcement of the disastrous truth was awaiting him at his own house. Next morning, at a very early hour, he sent a message to my father begging him to go to him as quickly as he could. Much alarmed—thinking Sir Walter must have been taken ill—his friend hurried to him at seven o'clock in

the morning. He found him already seated at his writing-table by candle-light, and, turning round, he at once held out his hand to my father, saying, "S——, this is the hand of a beggar; I am ruined *de fond en comble.*"

It was, I believe, only a day or two after the cruel extent of his losses had become known to him, that he came to our house one afternoon for the solace and rest which I think he always found under his friend's roof.

It so happened that we were entertaining guests that day, and Sir Walter naturally did not feel equal to meeting any ordinary acquaintance at a time when he was suffering so much from anxiety and depression of spirits. My mother therefore installed him comfortably in a room where he would be quite undisturbed; regretting that both she and my father were obliged to leave him for an hour or two in order to attend to their visitors. She noticed that he was looking with his usual kind smile towards her youngest child, who had followed her into the room, and thinking that he might welcome any interruption to his own sad thoughts, she said to him, "Shall I leave my little F—— with you? perhaps she may amuse you till we can come back."

"Yes, do, by all means," he said; "I shall be glad to have her."

She went out leaving me alone with him. I seem to see him now, seated in an easy-chair near the fire, with his back to the light and his kind face in shadow as he turned it towards me.

"Come here, my dear, and sit on my knee," he said. He lifted me up and put his arm round me, and I leant against his breast, thinking how happy I was to be all alone with him, for I loved him much.

"Now, my dear little girl," he said, "I know you like me to tell you stories, but do you know I have not got a single story in my head to-day; so we will make a complete change for once, and you shall tell me a story, which I will listen to, instead of talking this time."

I made no difficulty whatever about doing as he desired, for I entered upon authorship at a very early age, and wrote a novel in large text in an old account-book, which drew shouts of laughter from my elder brothers when they chanced to see it. I therefore began at once with the coolest effrontery to give the great writer the benefit of my fanciful ideas, and invented then and there a long romance about giants, and fairies, and water kelpies—supernatural phantasms of that description being at all times the objects of my special predilection.

Sir Walter listened with the utmost good humour, and I think with some amusement, as he laughed out heartily every now and then; and when my mother came at last to relieve him from my society, he lifted me down to the floor with a kind embrace, saying:

"Well, Mrs. S——, your little girl has undoubtedly got plenty of imagination, at all events."

With all his remarkable geniality and playfulness when among children, Sir Walter was tenacious of his dignity in some respects,

and especially in regard to his own Christian name, which had come to him through a long line of ancestors, and was greatly prized by him. He was much in the habit of giving fanciful names to us children. One of my sisters, whose little fair head was adorned with many ringlets, he always called Curlinda; and some of us, in a spirit of imitation, ventured once to speak of him as Sir Wattie. We were most promptly checked by our mother, who said that nothing would annoy our kind friend more than to have his beautiful name altered in any way, and that we must never venture to take such a liberty again; nor did we from that day forward.

Perhaps the remarkable vividness with which I retain my recollection of Sir Walter's appearance may be due in part to the fact that he gave my father a full-length portrait of himself, in which he is represented seated, with his two favourite dogs by his side; it is a facsimile of one life-size executed in oils by Raeburn, and it still remains the cherished possession of my father's descendants. There was, however, a special link between Sir Walter and myself, in the tender affection which I felt towards his eldest little grandson, John Hugh Lockhart—the Hugh Littlejohn of the "Tales of a Grandfather."

The whole history of this dear gifted child's short life, and of Sir Walter's feelings respecting him, is very pathetic. He was the first-born son of his daughter Sophia (Mrs. Lockhart), and was a singularly engaging child, very clever and animated, full of interest in all around him, but from infancy afflicted with a spinal complaint, which rendered him a perfectly helpless invalid. The fluctuating hopes and fears which held all who loved him in suspense throughout his brief existence in this world, are most touchingly expressed by Sir Walter himself in his private records, and form in fact almost a history of that cherished life, from its first dawn of golden promise to its final passing into the eternal day. When that day came, it was thus recorded by Sir Walter in his Diary:

"Poor Johnnie Lockhart! the boy is gone whom we made so much of! I could not have borne it better than I now do, and I might have borne it much worse."

This event took place on December 15th, 1831, and Sir Walter received the sad news at Naples, during that last journey which he undertook in the vain hope of restoring his own failing health; but he only survived his cherished grandchild a very few months.

The history of little Johnnie as given by Sir Walter is mournful enough, but my own recollections of him are all bright and happy. He was a little older than myself, but we enjoyed the most perfect companionship together. He used to lie on the drawing-room sofa in my father's house, while I sat on a low chair by his side, and we had thus many charming hours of amusement.

I had some other playmates at that time, who were objects of very special interest to Sir Walter Scott, and concerning whom we were able to furnish him with a good deal of desirable information.

The exiled King of France, Charles X., was then resident in Holyrood Palace with his two grandchildren—the Duc de Bordeaux, afterwards known as the Comte de Chambord; and his sister Louise, who was never designated otherwise than as Mademoiselle. Their governess, the Duchesse de Gontaut, was a friend of my mother's, and, as it was thought desirable that the royal children should have some young companions, we were selected to associate with them, and frequently went to them at Holyrood, while they were often also invited to our house. Mademoiselle especially enjoyed coming to us, away from all the stiffness of Court etiquette, and also because she had a quite romantic attachment to one of my sisters, Sir Walter's Curlinda. On one occasion, when she came to us without her brother, we got leave to make our escape from the solemnity of the drawing-room, where Madame de Gontaut was seated with my mother, and we all ran off together to amuse ourselves in some other room. We chose my father's study as the scene of our exploits, knowing that he had gone out. Arrived there, my sister suggested that as Mademoiselle was sure to be a queen some day, we had better erect a throne for her on the top of the writing-table and duly install her in it. The young princess was a very clever, thoughtful child, and her words were characteristic: "*Ah, chérie!* who can say whether in the future I shall be a poor little queen or a magnificent beggar." As a matter of fact, she became Duchess of Parma. But we carried out our design of treating her as a future monarch; by means of a pile of cushions on the study table, we raised a very satisfactory throne, and placed her upon it. Then I believe one of us acted as principal lady-in-waiting, and formally presented the others, who made profound curtsies, and were received by the princess with becoming dignity. In the midst of this little Court drama the door opened, and my father walked in, not being even aware that there were any visitors in the house, and he stopped in some surprise to contemplate the scene. I do not quite remember whether Sir Walter was with him or not, but a full detail of the little picture was just calculated to strike his poetic fancy.

But whatever undeserved honour and glory I might have acquired in playing with the royal children, I was much happier when I was left alone with my dear Johnnie in our own quiet corner of the drawing-room. His only sister Charlotte became at a later period an intimate friend of mine. She was one of the loveliest beings, both in appearance and in mind and disposition, that was ever given to brighten life for too brief a space to those who loved her. I retain a most tender and admiring recollection of her, but Johnnie was never forgotten as my special companion, even after he had passed from human sight and knowledge.

Of course all the members of Sir Walter's family were well known to me in those days. I can just remember Lady Scott, as a pretty little old lady, dining at our house; but his daughter Anne used to stay with us for many weeks together, and I can well recall her

employing me to look out the consecutive pages of the proof sheets she was examining for her father. It was one of the numerous books sent by struggling authors for his opinion before publication.

The last of Sir Walter's children whom I ever saw, was his second son Charles. It was a considerable time after his father's death, when I was living with my parents in Athens, where we had our home for several years. Charles was on his way to enter on a diplomatic appointment in Persia, and came to pay us a visit in Greece. He was my father's godson, and we were all delighted to see him; he seemed at that time, while still quite a young man, to have a career of the greatest promise before him. He was, I think, the most talented of all Sir Walter's children: brilliant in conversation, animated and witty, with a charming countenance brightened by keen flashing eyes that were often sparkling with amusement. My recollection of him during that visit, shows him to have been in exceptionally high spirits; so much so indeed, that according to the old Scottish superstition often mentioned by Sir Walter in his works, he might have been supposed to be *fey* (*i.e.*, seized with a peculiar gaiety which is considered the weird herald of approaching death), for the dark unseen shadow was even then advancing swiftly on his path.

As I recall that happy time, I seem almost to hear again his peals of merry laughter ringing through the room. They were called out especially by the amusement he derived from a very cherished possession of my own. This was a large owl, which had been caught for me on the Acropolis, and to which I had given the name of Minerva in honour of the goddess. It had become extremely tame, and used to march with a stately step through the *salon;* but it had acquired, I cannot tell how, a curious habit of bowing, in the most solemn manner possible, to any person who approached it. Charles was beyond measure amused by this performance, which he made the bird go through again and again, seeming to think that my Minerva displayed all the concentrated wisdom of the ancient Greeks.

At length he had to take leave of us, and sailed for Persia, where very soon after we had the pain of hearing he had died very prematurely and suddenly.

Of Sir Walter himself I have still two specially distinct memories, one of which refers to an episode in his early life, with which our family was somewhat nearly concerned.

It has been recorded in his son-in-law's account of his life, that he had in the days of his youth formed a most passionate attachment to a young lady, who was not, however, destined to become his wife. The period during which his thoughts and hopes were entirely centred upon her, seems to have been about five years; for long afterwards, when an old man, he alludes to it as his "three years of dreaming and two years of awakening."

The mournful awakening was caused by the marriage of the lady he loved so well, to my mother's brother, Sir William Forbes. This

gentleman was one of Sir Walter's own friends, and it was quite in accordance with the noble nature of both men, that the rivalry which terminated so sadly for Sir Walter, never interrupted their friendship. They did not meet very often afterwards, as my uncle was a very reserved, sensitive man, who withdrew more and more from society as he advanced in life. Sir Walter alludes to his disposition in this respect in the dedication to one of the cantos in "Marmion," where he says, addressing my father:—

> "Thou and I . . .
> And one whose name I may not say,
> For not mimosa's tender tree
> Shrinks sooner from the touch than he."

Sir William Forbes, however, gave him a touching proof of his unfailing regard at the time of Sir Walter's pecuniary misfortunes; for he secretly took upon himself one of the most pressing debts, and defrayed it without Sir Walter ever learning the fact till after his friend had gone from this world.

My personal recollection connected with Sir Walter's early romance springs from an incident which took place long after the lady of his love and her husband had both been dead for many years.

Lady Forbes' mother, Lady Jane Stuart, survived them both for a very considerable time. Sir Walter had long held no intercourse with her, till he suddenly received a letter from her, formally asking his leave to print some MS. ballads he had written in an album belonging to her departed daughter. His answer drew forth a second letter from the aged lady, offering, him the cherished album as a gift, and adding: "Were I to lay open my heart, you would find how it has and ever shall be warm towards you: my age encourages me, and I have longed to tell you not the mother who bore you followed you more anxiously with her blessing than I!"

Sir Walter alludes to this letter in his own records that evening:

"A surprise, amounting nearly to a shock, reached me in another letter from Lady Jane Stuart. Methinks this explains the gloom which hung about me yesterday. I own that the recurrence of these matters seems like a summons from the grave; it fascinates me. I ought perhaps to have stopped it at once; but I had not nerve to do so—alas! alas! but why alas? *Humana perpessi sumus.*"

It was decided after this that Sir Walter should have an interview with the mother of his early love, never having seen her since the days when her young daughter was the object of his fondest hopes. He had then been for some time the faithful widower of the dear wife with whom he had spent many years of happy married life; but the memory of the past was strong upon him, and he could not face the meeting with Lady Jane alone.

He asked my mother to accompany him upon this painful visit, as she of course knew all the circumstances, and was intimate with her

sister-in-law's mother. She was ready to do anything he wished, but dreaded the interview, which she knew would be painful to both.

I have the picture now in my mind of Sir Walter walking slowly by my mother's side, with his halting step, on his way to Lady Jane's house; and when the visit was over, my mother returned home greatly moved by what she had witnessed. She said the meeting had been most deeply affecting, as both Sir Walter and Lady Jane Stuart were completely overcome. He says in his own record of the painful scene, that after it was over he "was fit for nothing but shedding tears and repeating verses for the whole night. This is sad work," he adds, "the very grave gives up its dead. What a romance to tell! and told it will one day be—but the dead will feel no pain."

He continued after this to visit the aged lady, at intervals, till her death about two years later.

The last vivid picture of Sir Walter Scott which remains strongly impressed on my memory is of a nature which may make it seem strange that I should record it as a reality; but I can only say that it is one of the most life-like representations of his appearance and manner which yet exist in my mind.

My father had reached his ninetieth year, and more than a quarter of a century had elapsed since he had fainted, as we have said, beside the open grave of the friend he had never ceased to remember with deep affection. Notwithstanding his great age, his faculties remained quite unimpaired. By day his intelligence was as bright as ever; only at night, when sleep was difficult to him, his mind would sometimes wander back to the past.

I had left him one autumn evening alone for a few minutes, seated by the fire, with only his man-servant in the adjoining room, ready to attend to him if necessary. When I returned, after a brief absence, I was surprised to find my father's countenance almost transfigured by an expression of the most radiant delight.

The moment I came in he turned to me, and told me he had just experienced an unexpected and inexpressible joy; he had seen dear Scott again! he had walked into the room quite suddenly and told him he had come from a very long distance to visit him. Then my father described his unchanged appearance, and how he had sat down on the other side of the hearth. It had been such a joyful meeting, my father said, but dear Scott did not stay very long. His account was so detailed and clear, that I almost felt as if I had myself seen what he described, and the remembrance has never left me.

A very few days later, there came an evening when my father fell asleep, and lay in a gentle slumber through the hours of darkness. But he "*had another dawn than ours.*" Before the morning broke he had followed his best-loved friend to that fair land where the light fades not, and no shadow from earthly grief or pain can ever fall upon the Perfect Day.

F. M. F. S.

THE LAW OF LIFE.

By Ida Lemon.

"BACON again! And, my dear Nellie, I wish you would tell Maria that it is necessary to make bacon warm, at any rate. No, thank you, dear, I can't touch it. With my digestion in its present state I should be unfit to work if I even attempted a square inch of it. Are there any eggs in the house? I might venture on an egg."

"There are only shop eggs, dear. New laid are so expensive, just at present."

"Well, I must have *something*. I can't possibly work on an empty stomach. I'll ring for the joint."

Mrs. Lawrence sighed faintly. The joint was intended for the children's dinner.

Hubert attacked the meagre leg of mutton with zest. His wife toyed with the unpalatable bacon, then laid down her knife and fork, baffled in her endeavour to eat. She was pale, and there were dark hollows beneath her eyes. She looked haggard, and older than her husband, though in reality she was six years his junior. His friends complained that she was dowdy.

"Are you going to do those articles that Mr. Nicholson suggested to you, Hubert?"

"Perhaps, my dear. But I can't begin them this morning. I had an idea for a poem last night, and I want to start it at once. It so took possession of me that I could not sleep."

"I didn't sleep either," said Mrs. Lawrence plaintively.

"I'm afraid I disturbed you, dear. I was restless I know. But you can't imagine what it is to be in a creative mood. The mind suffers in the effort to embody the inspiration, but conception is pure joy. I was carried away by the possibilities of my subject. Indeed, but for the cold, I was tempted to get up at once, and begin the poem. Several lines formed themselves."

Mrs. Lawrence nodded vacantly. She was wondering if a pound of steak would eke out the mutton, and whether Maria would be offended if she asked her to warm up the bacon for her own luncheon.

"You don't seem to take much interest in it, Nellie."

"Oh yes, I do—indeed, I do, dear. And what is the subject?"

She fixed her weary eyes on him—the eyes which once had grown brighter at his coming, and sweeter for thoughts of him who had been her girlhood's ideal.

"Well, I shall call it 'The Law of Life,' because the law of life, of all life, seems to me to be sacrifice, and that is my theme. Now you

see"—he pushed aside his plate, and leant his elbow on the table—"you see, dear, there are, so to speak, two sorts of sacrifice, and that is what I want to lay special stress on. I don't know if the subject has been dealt with before; it may have been, probably has; but I am convinced it has not been dealt with in my way, at any rate in poetry. There is the sacrifice which is what I may call involuntary, and under this class we must include all inferior creatures. The law of the survival of the fittest which holds throughout creation, entails the annihilation of the unfit; the greater feeds on the lesser, the strong triumphs over the weak, the higher organisms absorb the lower. *But*"—and here Hubert took up the spoon and emphasised his remarks with taps on the saucer, which had the effect of recalling Nellie's wandering attention—"*but*, the mistake is, to imagine there is any merit in such sacrifice. There is *no* merit. How can there be? It is purely the result of incompetence. The person or thing sacrificed is passive not active, and there is no more reason to glorify any one for consenting to be sacrificed, than for catching the measles. Submission is weakness. Self-assertion is strength. Strength is to be striven after. Do you follow me?"

"Yes—yes, dear, I think so," said Mrs. Lawrence, with a smile that was strangely pathetic, because somehow her eyes looked frightened. "You mean that the weak *must* give themselves up, and so there is no goodness in it. But don't you think there might be—well, there might be something noble in the way they submit. I mean, you may have to do a thing and yet—Oh, dear, I can't express myself as I want to—but——"

She paused, and began rolling crumbs of bread into a ball with her thumb and forefinger; from the action of her throat it seemed as if she were with difficulty swallowing some hard substance; but her mouth was empty.

"Well, and then there is the second class," went on Hubert, with a wave of his hand as if to push aside an objection not worth looking at; "and it is especially on that that I wish to dwell. My dear Nellie"—he flung himself back in his chair, and ran his fingers through the fair hair which he wore somewhat long in front so that it had a trick of falling over his forehead—"there is enough to compose a book if one lays down for meditation all the heads in that class. There is the sacrifice of the strong for the weak—the *voluntary* sacrifice, you understand, such for instance as the sacrifice of Buddha; then the sacrifice of mothers to their children, inspired by love—ah, you like that I see! Yes, yes, we must appeal to all sides of humanity; that is the poet's mission—his great mission. Ah, and the poet himself, he makes a sacrifice; he gives his soul, his heart, his intellect—to whom? To an ungrateful world which cannot understand him because he is so far above it; but his sacrifice is not in vain, for he elevates, he teaches, and at last the world *is* fitted to receive his message. The martyrs of science, of art, of religion, all, *all* have

been voluntary sacrificers, priests offering themselves on their own altars. I must adduce them as examples—think, my dear, of the long line of them—the vista which presents itself to the imagination is glorious—it is positively overwhelming!"

The poet rose from his chair, and began pacing up and down the room. At last he stopped opposite his wife, and gazed at her. She was still absently making balls of bread, though she had accumulated a small pile of them.

"Well?" he said, for she had made no remark on his harangue.

At his voice, which was louder than usual and not free from displeasure, she started, and glanced up.

"I was thinking, dear," she said deprecatingly, "won't it be rather —long?"

"I don't know," he answered shortly. "Perhaps." And he turned on his heel.

"Good heavens," he remarked mentally, "what it is to have a wife so devoid of soul, of imagination! She has absolutely no sympathy for art. I might as well speak to a stone. Better! It would be less aggravating."

"When it is done," said Mrs. Lawrence slowly, "do you suppose you will sell it soon, dear?"

"I don't know. How can I tell?" he answered abruptly.

"Hubert."

"What?"

"When will you begin those articles for Mr. Nicholson?"

"Oh, when I am in the mood for them. Really, Nellie, it's no good worrying me about them. How could I do them well when my mind is full of something else? It's absurd, you know; it's unreasonable."

"But Mr. Nicholson pays so promptly, and—and——" She passed her hand across her eyes.

"What?"

"Oh, Hubert! There's so much to think of. I know it's very silly of me, and I don't want to spoil your pleasure in your work, but—fame is so long in coming, and we are so very poor."

"That is so like a woman," Lawrence cried impatiently. "Don't you see that in the future I shall earn much more than if I did hack-work now. You don't want me to prostitute my intellect, I suppose. It's a wicked thing to do—it's sinning against the gifts of Providence."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Lawrence, who was crying feebly, "but —the children—and I am so tired."

She laid her arms down on the table, and hid her face on them.

"Pshaw!" muttered Hubert.

Then he came over to her, and patted the bowed head. Mrs. Lawrence's hair had been black, but it was already beginning to be streaked with grey. Her husband noticed it at this moment, and

somehow it annoyed him. He was a great admirer of beauty, and he imagined he loved his wife.

"There, there," he said soothingly, "you're overdone, my dear! I must manage for you to have a little holiday. There is sure to be a cheque before long" (how often his wife had heard this—it had lost its power to comfort now). "Sure to be. Come, cheer up. You unnerve me. And I shan't be able to work, and then of course we can't earn. There, that's right," as she looked up, and tried to smile; "I can't bear to see you unhappy, little woman. You used to be so bright."

"Was I?" she thought drearily. "It all seems so long ago." But she kissed her husband with lips that still trembled. He had not lost his fascination for her, though her idolatry was over long ago. She realised that he had eyes, but saw not, and ears, but did not hear, like those whom the foolish heathen worshipped; and so, though she still made sacrifices to him, they were made through compulsion and sometimes even laid on the altar with scorn and unbelief.

"That is right. Now, I will take a turn in the garden, and then I will set to work at once. Don't let any of the children come to the study, and if I don't appear at luncheon, you might send me a cup of coffee and some biscuits. Perhaps you'll bring it in yourself. Maria always makes such a clatter, and it's disturbing."

He went off, to work himself into a frame of mind suitable for poetical composition. Mrs. Lawrence sobbed for a few minutes, but she could not indulge herself. Besides, she had a horror of what she called "giving way." She took her key-basket before long, and made her way to the kitchen, to give orders to the general servant.

"There ain't much in the house," said Maria, "'cepting fragments. There was a bit of mack'rel, but I giv' it to Master Johnny for supper; what with the heat and that, I don't hold with keepin' fish on hand; and I expec' master's made a hole in the mutton. Why didn't he eat his bacon? Ain't bacon good enough for him?"

"It was a little underdone, Maria. And you know how particular the master has to be with his delicate digestion!"

Maria snorted.

"Him got indigestion! why, he's as hearty as a ostrich. I've lived with a dyspeptic gentleman, and I knows how indigest'n takes a person—there's redness of nose, and flatilence after meals, and things o' that sort. Indigestion indeed! I wonder he don't engage a perfeshunal cook, if he's so particular."

"Hush, Maria!" said Mrs. Lawrence with dignity.

"If I don't suit, p'raps I'd better go where I'm appreciated," said Maria sulkily.

"But you do suit us, Maria. I am quite satisfied with you on the whole. I think you are a very good, patient girl."

"And so one had need be," said the servant, a little mollified. "Howsomdever, I shall be havin' a home of my own before long."

"Don't be in a hurry to marry, Maria," said Mrs. Lawrence, gently. "It isn't all love-making, you know."

"Oh, I'm not in any hurry partikler. Nor's Jim. We've kep' company for four years, and he only mentioned furniture last week. One can't take it a man's in earnest till he mentions furniture, but that means business, and when they means business it don't do to thwart 'em. Well, touchin' that mutton, shall we make up with a bit of stew! I've got some onions, and I can run round to Curtis's. Oh, I remember——"

"What, Maria?" as the girl reddened and looked awkward.

"Why, m'm," said Maria, fidgetting with her apron, "it ain't as I want to make you uncomfortable, but——"

"Well?"

"Why, last time I went there, that day the ribs wasn't quite fresh, the man was quite impert'nent. 'You'd better tell your missus,' says he, 'that when people don't pay their bills, they can't expec' to be served like them as does.' 'That's false,' says I; 'my missus pays reg'lar.' 'Do she!' says he, 'why they're the talk of the neighbourhood, and you'd better keep your eye on your wages.' 'Which, none of your insinivations,' says I; 'I've had 'em reg'lar at the quarter, and I don't put my foot in this shop agen.' And I took up my fresh ribs and walked. You'll excuse me mentionin' of it, ma'am."

"Yes, Maria," said Mrs. Lawrence absently. She gave the rest of her orders, and went upstairs. Before going to the nursery, she re-entered the sitting-room, and unlocked her desk. She took out her account book, and ran her eye down it. Then she hurried across the passage to her husband's room. He was not there, but still enjoying his saunter round the garden. She went to the window, and called him. "Hubert!" And again, as he took no notice: "Hubert."

He strolled down the gravel path, and stood under the window, the sunlight on his handsome, careless, sensuous face.

"What do you want, Nellie? I asked particularly not to be disturbed."

"But you are not working yet, dear."

"I *am*. It's so silly to imagine that one is not working unless one s sitting at a table with a pen in one's hand. My brain is most active, and I have already completed the first stanza. I think I shall adopt the metre of——"

"Hubert, excuse my interrupting you, but I have so much to do, I can't wait. Didn't you give Curtis the bank-note I gave you on the 10th. I want the receipt."

"Oh, my dear girl, I meant to tell you. Yes, yes." He fidgetted a little, uneasily, with his foot, kicking a stone away.

"You did?"

"No, I didn't take it to Curtis after all."

"What did you do with it?" Mrs. Lawrence's face had grown

very white and stiff-looking. "You know I particularly asked you to go there because I couldn't leave baby."

"And so I should have done, my dear, only I remembered that I was out of foolscap, and as I went down the High Street, I got some at Berdoe's, and when I handed him that note, he came down upon me for something I owed him for some old editions he had procured for me. I wouldn't quarrel with Berdoe for the world; it would be so unpleasant; besides, he knows so many professional men; so I thought it best to settle with him. Of course one can't explain to a man like that that one hasn't got the money. It would be *infra dig.* And Curtis can wait. He's a great deal better off than we are."

Mrs. Lawrence moistened her lips before she spoke again.

"But the money was not yours to spend, Hubert. It was what my father sent me for my birthday."

"My *dear* Nellie, you quibble. If you were good enough to spend the money on paying a bill, it surely couldn't matter *which* bill was paid. But for heaven's sake don't let's quarrel about it. Nothing could be more vulgar."

Her eyes flashed, and the colour leapt into her cheeks. But she did not speak. She stepped back into the room, and crushed her hands on her heaving bosom.

"I thought my spirit was broken," she said between her clenched teeth, "but it isn't—it isn't. I have enough left to hate him—to *hate* him." Then, frightened at her own vehemence, she ran from the room and up to the nursery to take refuge with her children.

Hubert meanwhile went back to his meditations.

"I am glad Nellie does not nag like some women," he thought comfortably; "I don't think she'll allude to the subject again. And I shall soon be able to pay her back. Of course she couldn't exactly realise *how* inexpedient it would be to quarrel with Berdoe. . . . Dear, dear. I wish I could have a study out of the house. Nothing is so deadening as these domestic worries. Let me think, where was I?——

"'And, drunk with its own wine, the reeling mind——' No, I hardly like that."

"'The reeling mind, intoxicate——' No, that's worse. When one gets hold of an image, it haunts one. 'And with its spirits wine——' That's ridiculous! I think I'll keep the other:

> "And drunk with its own wine, the reeling mind
> Pursues its way, nor feels the mocking wind,
> The scorching sun, ..."

"Perhaps 'heeds' is a better word than 'feels.' I suppose I may as well go into the study, now. The sun is getting rather overpowering."

Mrs. Lawrence could not afford to keep a nurse. She had in occasionally a nurselet who had not yet flowered into full dignity. This young person helped Maria, and looked after Mabel when she would otherwise have had to be left alone. Mabe

was the youngest child, and she was three years old; Johnny, who was eight, went to school, only just at present he was having his summer holidays; and Norah was two years younger than he. When the nursemaid was otherwise occupied, Norah kept an eye on her little sister. Mrs. Lawrence saw as much of them as she could, but as she had to do some of the housework, and to make their clothes, it was not possible for her to enjoy their society at leisure. The children loved their faded, gentle little mother, and ran to meet her joyfully when she opened the nursery door. The nurse, a pale, solemn-faced maiden, who looked as if Nature had pinched her features playfully before she had cast her on one side, was washing up the breakfast-things, pausing every now and then to scratch the tip of her thin nose with a damp forefinger. She loved Mrs. Lawrence too, and a twitching of her mouth to one side, which was her manner of smiling, testified to her pleasure at seeing her.

"Ma," shouted Johnny, brandishing a letter before her, "I am glad you've come up! Look here, this is from Chesley. And what do you think? He's in Folkestone—they've got a house for the holidays; no end of larks. And can I go, he says?"

His cheeks and eyes were bright with excitement as he gave her the letter to read. Johnny was Mrs. Lawrence's favourite child, her eldest, and her only son. She kissed him as she took the grimy epistle, with the wild handwriting, from his hot hand. Johnny was getting too old for these demonstrations; he began to resent them as a slur on his manliness. But he submitted now, with a good grace, and even returned the caress; he wished to coax his mother, and be in her good books.

"May I?"

Mrs. Lawrence read through the note. It was short, and yet it took her a long time to reach the end. At any rate, it seemed to Johnny ages before she answered him.

"I don't—see—how you can, sonny."

"Oh, mother!"

It cut her to the heart to see how the little face fell. She turned away her own with faltering resolution.

"Let me read it through again, dear."

Johnny began to kick with impatience; he had mastered the contents of the note in a few seconds. He could not see why his mother took so long about it. He did not know that she was making mental calculations all the time her eyes were fixed on the words which ran sloping down the page:

"Dear Lawrence,—We have been here a week, and it is splended. I go in a boat and catch fish. At least father catches, and i go in the boat you wouldn't beleeve how jolly it is, and the weather is jolly. I hope you are quite well. Would you like to come hear, my mother says tell your mother she would be very plesed and you could learn

to swim with me, it would be jolly. i hope you can. Are you learning your holiday tarsk? I am not yet. Rite soon and tell me,

"Your affecshunate friend,

"TOM TAYLOR CHESLEY."

"P.S. i mean rite soon about if you can come, not the holiday tarsk.

"P.S. (2) My mother says 'when.'

"TOM TAYLOR CHESLEY."

"Well, mother—oh, don't say 'No.'"

"I don't want to, Johnny."

He sidled up to her and put his arm round her neck.

"You needn't funk about the sea, because I'll be ever so careful. Besides, Chesley says his father was a sailor, once; and all the boys have gone somewhere, I'm the only one who stayed at home for the holidays. And it is rather rot, now isn't it?"

"Darling, I wish we could have gone away—all of us." And Mrs. Lawrence lifted the pale baby on to her lap.

"I want to go to the sea too, mamma," said Norah. "I remember last year with Aunt Annie, and it *was* nice; and I've got my pail still, and the spade. Can't I go if Johnny goes?"

"You're not asked, stupid," said Johnny. "Chesley doesn't care about girls, and besides——"

"Hush, Johnny! Perhaps we'll go away together, one of these days, Norah darling, when papa's ship comes home."

"And take baby?"

"Take ba-bee," lisped Mabel.

"Yes, my precious," said her mother, clasping her closer.

More than Johnny or Norah she longed for the sea. It seemed to her that she would be perfectly happy, if she might only sit quite still for a little while, and feel the sea-spray on her face, and taste the saltness of the air, and let the wind blow on her forehead. Oh, if she might go straight away—away from the heat, and the weariness, and the cares, and the sense of never being alone! Ah, but no—she must have her children with her; and watch them playing and running, and hear their laughter, while they gained colour and beauty and strength. That would rest her too.

"Then I can write and say 'Yes,' mother. And I'll want some new shoes, please, because there's a hole in mine."

"And so there is a hole in mine, too," chirped Norah, who always imitated her brother. "Look!" and balancing herself precariously on one foot, she raised the other for inspection.

"Oh, Johnny, my dearie, I don't see *how* we can afford it."

Johnny, who was already fumbling at his little writing-case, turned round suddenly, and dropped his ink-pot with a crash.

"Do you mean, I *mayn't?*" he cried, his face crimson with anger and surprise. "Oh, it *is* a shame!"

"Lor, Master Johnny," screamed the nursemaid, "the ink's a comin' hout. Oh, I never did!" and she rushed to his side and began wiping the floor with the tea-cloth, which eventually she employed for rubbing the nose-tip, the constant irritation of which now inopportunely asserted itself.

Mrs. Lawrence was torn between a desire to laugh, and a desire to cry, as she looked from the pale face of the maid with its blackened feature, to the red, wrathful visage of her little boy.

"It *is* a shame!" repeated Johnny. "All other people go away in the summer, and I don't see why *we* should be poked up in London."

"You have the garden to play in, my child."

"That's no good. It isn't a big garden. Besides, it isn't like the sea."

"No," said Mrs. Lawrence, her sense of the ridiculous asserting itself, and she laughed.

Johnny laughed too. His anger was never of long duration. And he took this as a good omen.

"Oh, mother, you don't mean 'No' really, do you?"

"I don't *want* to mean it, dearie. But I don't see what we can do. You see I'm not rich, like Mrs. Chesley. You'd want a new suit of clothes as well as your railway-fare; and shoes, and a hat; and I'm very short of money just at present."

She thought of the five pounds and sighed.

"I'll give up my pocket-money, mother, till it's paid off."

"Oh, Johnny, you have as much idea of what things cost—as your father"—she was going to add, but said instead—"as the baby. A penny a week is only four and fourpence a year, my lamb, and you would have to go without your pennies for a great many years before you paid it off."

"Oh, very well," said Johnny submissively. He was not pleased with the prospect of having no toffee for years to come. "I suppose I'll have not to go, but I do wish we had a rich father. It's no fun when you can't do things."

He took the sheet of paper and began to write.

"Look here, mother," he said suddenly, his eyes full of tears. "I don't know how I can tell Chesley. I'm not going to let him see how poor we are. He wouldn't understand." The little voice was as proud as its tremulousness would allow.

Mrs. Lawrence ought perhaps to have demonstrated to him that poverty was no disgrace, and that it was sinful to be ashamed of it. But somehow she never thought of that. Her own sensitiveness made her realise exactly how her little son was feeling about it; besides, his attempt at resignation seemed to her more touching than his anger. It was so good of him to try and be brave, poor little fellow, and it was very hard that he should not have a bright childhood. And he needed a change. He was growing, and his face was thinner than she liked to see it.

"Johnny," she said desperately, "you must go.

"But," he replied, his shining eyes contradicting the words, "I don't want to if it's going to be very dear. I'll say no, if you'd rather. I don't care so much, mother."

"Yes," said Mrs. Lawrence, "you must go. But don't write to Chesley yet. We must see about trains first. Norah, play with baby a little while, will you, dearie? You can go out in the garden if you like, only keep in the shady part."

She went up to her bedroom, and locked the door. Then she knelt down, hiding her face in her thin hands. She had retained the simple faith of her girlhood. If she had not been in the habit of taking her troubles to God, she would have given in long ago, and grown bitter and callous.

"Dear Father," she prayed, "show me what I can do. Do not let my little ones lose the sunshine of their childhood though I am left in shadow. I want them to be happy. Help me not to have hard thoughts of their father, but to forgive him his faults as I hope mine will be forgiven. Oh, my Father, I am very tired, but Thou canst give me strength. If there is any sacrifice I can make, I will do it so gladly."

At the word "sacrifice" there entered her mind the words her husband had said to her that morning at breakfast. She stopped in her praying, and a queer little smile came into her eyes. It seemed incongruous that the man who had never given up a pleasure, or a wish, or a penny for others should feel competent to write a poem on the joys and pains of sacrifice, and be, as he professed, carried away by the beauty of the subject. Ah well, *he* thought nothing of her sacrifices, they were "involuntary." She was not good enough to want to make them, and they were prompted by necessity. What had he said? "The mistake is, to imagine there is any merit in such sacrifice. There is *no* merit. It is the result of incompetence." Well, she was one of the "inferior creatures" to whom he had alluded, and it was at any rate her duty, if not her glory, to submit. And she could do her duty.

She crouched down by the bed for some little time, waiting. She hoped that somehow God would help her. At last she sprang up. An idea had occurred to her which she was surprised had never suggested itself before. She could get rid of her jewellery! She took down the Japanese case where she kept it, and poured the contents of the drawers on to the bed. They did not make a very grand display. There were some coral ornaments she had had in her childhood, a locket or two, the pearls her mother had given her at her confirmation—she kissed those and laid them on one side—a little diamond star which had been her husband's wedding present (she could not remember that she had ever received a present since), and a rather valuable bracelet which had been the gift of her father. As she handled the bracelet she hesitated, pondering a second. Should she appeal to her father? No; she put aside the thought

almost at once. He had never liked her husband, and it was all she could do to keep peace between them as it was. He was so fond of her, that for his sake she was obliged to hide from him as far as possible what her life really was. And had he not so recently sent her five pounds, that he might be justified in asking how she had spent it? She laid the bracelet by the side of the star; then put those and the other trinkets, all but the pearls, into a box, and, shivering a little, unlocked the door.

As she tied her bonnet-strings before the glass she was shocked at her own face.

"How ugly I have grown," she thought, "and how old! After all, I am not the sort of person who needs jewellery."

It was very hot in the street. Mrs. Lawrence looked in vain for a shady side. The sun seemed to beat on her, and she felt weak and sick. But she set her lips together, and gathered all her resolution. It was not very far to the High Street. As she called up a mental vision of her destination, she blushed, and her eyes smarted. She had looked in at the window sometimes, and wondered what different fates had led people to dispose of the queer, various, occasionally beautiful things, displayed there. Perhaps after all most of the causes had been as unromantic, as commonplace as her own. "Coming down in the world," is an everyday occurrence, and as a rule attended with loss rather than increase of romance. There is a dowdiness about it, a sordid side. . . . Mrs. Lawrence did not look romantic just then, and she certainly did not feel it. She was not exactly miserable. She had a consciousness that nothing mattered very much, that there were many disagreeable things in life, and this was one of them. It had to be gone through with. So she walked straight on till she reached the shop with its well-known sign.

She cast a glance round, but none of her few acquaintances were visible, and she rapidly pushed open the door, and hurried into the cool, dark, musty shop, where Mrs. Z. Moss, proprietress, was sitting, in the absence of her husband.

The pawnbroker's wife was a fat woman, who wore a bright print skirt and a loose blouse. She looked up lazily at Mrs. Lawrence. The latter felt a sharp pang that was almost envy of this woman. Her husband worked, and she could sit in a comfortable armchair in comparative idleness. What a placid face she had, what plump cheeks, what twinkling eyes, and she was satisfied if only she could eat and drink well and read, as she had been doing, the penny love-stories of high life, with the illustrations of young dukes with sixteen inch waists, leaning carelessly against pillars, and making love to damsels seven feet high. Happy pawnbroker's wife!

The latter in her turn regarded Mrs. Lawrence, but she had not a sufficiently rapid brain to think about her till afterwards. She saw only a customer who looked ladylike, though she wore a shabby black dress and a faded bonnet; her face was a dull uniform pallor from the

heat, and her eyes were sunk deep in her head. Mrs. Moss did not find her interesting. Her jewellery was more so, especially the bracelet.

"I suppose her husband drinks," Mrs. Moss said to herself, half an hour afterwards, when she again picked up her paper, and resumed the protestations of Sir Cyril Vane to the hard-hearted Lady Alicia.

"It seems very little," Mrs. Lawrence thought. And all the way home she wondered if Mr. Moss would have given her more.

"Never mind," she said aloud, when she was once more in her own room, and had bathed her face and hands, "I will take them out—some day. Perhaps when Hubert has finished his poem, and had it accepted." She smiled rather drearily, and went to the door.

"Johnny," she called.

"Master John is in the garden, m'm," said the nursemaid appearing. "Lor'm, you do look tired!"

"Yes, I've been out, and the sun is strong." She went down the stairs, holding on to the banisters. At the door of the study she paused. She remembered the time-table was in there. She knocked.

"May I come in, dear?"

Hubert made a movement of impatience. "How *can* one work with these constant interruptions?" he said mentally; but answered, with what seemed to him admirable self-control, "Certainly, my love."

"I am not going to disturb you," said Nellie, as she stepped into the cool, comfortable room—the prettiest in the house—"I want the A. B. C., that is all."

"It's on the table by the window."

Mrs. Lawrence extracted it from the fascinating litter of books and papers which strewed the table alluded to. Hubert scratched a little with his pen. He was afraid that if he gave his wife an opening for conversation she would stay. She, on her part, did not mean to mention Johnny's trip till all arrangements were made.

When she was at the door once more, she could not resist asking, turning to look at him:

"How have you got on this morning, dear?"

"Pretty well,—oh, pretty well, thanks, Nellie. Not much in quantity you know, but excellent in quality. I'm fairly satisfied, on the whole. Eight lines is a decent morning's work. But still, to tell you the truth, the beauty of the subject makes me a bit dissatisfied. The difficulty is to do it justice."

COUNTRY LOVERS.

YOU and I were country lovers,
Courting in a country lane,
Where the lilac and laburnum
Shed their flowers of fragrant rain.
Thirty years this year, and backward
Time his pendulum has swung
To that rare and golden summer,
Love, when you and I were young.

I was but a simple rustic,
But of you to-day I'll swear,!
Not a lady in the county
Had a face one half so fair.
Was the love a whit less tender,
Or the joy less keen and fine,
That from 'neath a white sun-bonnet
Your eyes shyly answered mine?

I can see the gnarled old hawthorn
Where we loved to pause and wait,
Saying all-important nothings
Ere we reached your father's gate.
'Tis your mother's voice soft chiding—
"Saw ye such a pair as ours—
With the night dew fast a-falling,
Lingering there amid the flowers!

Yonder stands the grey old homestead,
Where the roses loved to climb,
Peering in at every lattice
All that glorious summer-time.
And the cheery farm-house kitchen,
With its spotless red-tiled floor,
And the hospitable firelight
Flickering thro' the open door.

Round it stretched the quaint old garden
And I fancy even yet
I can catch the subtle sweetness
From the beds of mignonette.
Just a wilderness of flowers
Modern gardeners despise;
But to me a mystic pleasaunce
Where I walked in Paradise.

There they grew in all their splendour
Sunflower gold, and hollyhocks,
Columbine, sweet-williams, poppies,
Gillyflowers and cheerful phlox.

Pansies growing down the borders,
Monkshood, marigold, and musk;
And the tall white summer lilies
Shining like great stars at dusk.

Thither came the sound of waters,
Coo of dove and hum of bees,
And the merry notes of blackbirds
Piping in the cherry-trees.
Throstles singing pastoral part-songs,
Cuckoo's cry along the vale;
And at eve the strange wild music
Of the love-lorn nightingale.

Ah, those blessed summer Sundays,
When we two had plighted troth!
How the distant church bells chiming
Rang as joy-bells for us both!
Fresh and sweet you walked beside me,
In your lilac cotton gown—
Have they any gear as dainty,
Wife, as that in London town?

I can see the swift soft blushes
Coming in that wild rose-face;
And the quick new lights of feeling
Giving newer, deeper grace;
Oh, the world was full of magic,
'Twas a strange enchanted land,
Where amid the waving cornfields
You and I walked hand in hand!

Thirty years ago this summer—
But the face that now I see,
Worn and seamed with toil and trouble,
Is a fairer face to me!
Joy and sorrow, we have known them,
And life's tale is well-nigh told,
Yet we still are young together
In a love that ne'er grows old.

Well, the world has prospered lately,
And since yon invention pays,
We can buy the dear old cottage
Where we mean to end our days.
Hey! for dewy mead and orchard,
After all life's toil and fret,
Patience, wife, a little longer,
We'll be country lovers yet!

CHRISTIAN BURKE

LETTERS FROM SOUTH AFRICA.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "In the Lotus-Land," etc., etc.

Cape Town, *April*, 1893.

Care Amice,—When I sent you word that I was going to South Africa in search of health, you first tried to dissuade me from my purpose; declared it a mistake; I should be in sympathy with nothing I saw, nothing I did; travelling about the country was difficult and laborious, wearying in its monotony. You urged me to come eastward; the Golden Horn alone was worth all the beauties of South Africa put together; whilst, with you, health, rest and recreation would be possible: in full measure. In South Africa, all these charms would be conspicuous by their absence. The country had nothing in common with one's love of antiquity and beauty; no ancient towns, no architectural monuments; none of the refined atmosphere always surrounding places "with a history" as with a halo.

Finally you played your trump card and used your strongest argument—just as ladies invariably put the pith and marrow of their letters into their postscript. Which, by the way, reminds me of a charming correspondent, who once sent me a budget of ten pages, full of descriptions of places and people in Switzerland, amongst whom she was sojourning; ending with "Yours most affectionately, Dorothy Boscawen." Then came, just as if it were an afterthought of small importance:

"P.S. I am going to be married next month to Sir John D., of whom I have seen a great deal out here—we were boy and girl lovers years ago, but the fates gave to him another woman and to me another man: both marriages, I fear, *de convenance*. Time has set us free, and in our renewed acquaintance old feelings revived. True, he is forty-one and I am thirty-six, but I think, the age of folly and romance being over, we may the more rely upon our 'sentiments.' We shall be married very quietly at Geneva: and as yet you are almost the only exception I have made in breaking silence about the matter. I want you to come out and give me away. Geneva and its neighbourhood at the end of October is more beautiful than you can imagine; the *repose* of everything after the rush and crowd of tourists—who have gone their several ways, North, South, East and West, to their separate countries—makes one think and dream of paradise. You will say that I ought to be in paradise, under any circumstances. *Mio amico*, at thirty-six we have ceased to pursue that *ignis fatuus* a paradise on earth: but I don't mind confessing to you that I am intensely happy,

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and very thankful for the new life that is before me. The old life, you know, was not——Ah! Treachery! John is looking over my shoulder, and declares that I must now give up all my male correspondents—he won't stand one of them. I tell him I would rather give up *him* than *you*. It is impudent of me—and I fear not true! He pretends to restore me my 'liberty'—you are the cause of our first quarrel! We make it up very prettily (you may guess how), and he grants the concession. Now in return for so much truth and fidelity, be here on the 1st of November without fail."

All this, I say, came in at the end of a closely-written budget of ten pages, very pretty and charming and graphic, but all about nothing, as one might say. The letter was the shell, the postscript held the kernel. So with you: you kept your strongest argument for the last: yourself. You referred to our old Egyptian days; to Cairo, its tombs and mosques; the desert and its wonderful freedom: to our delightful evenings, when you instructed me in the art of coffee-making, and conversation never flagged, and magic surrounded us, and the sands of life were gilded by the charms of a new-found friendship.

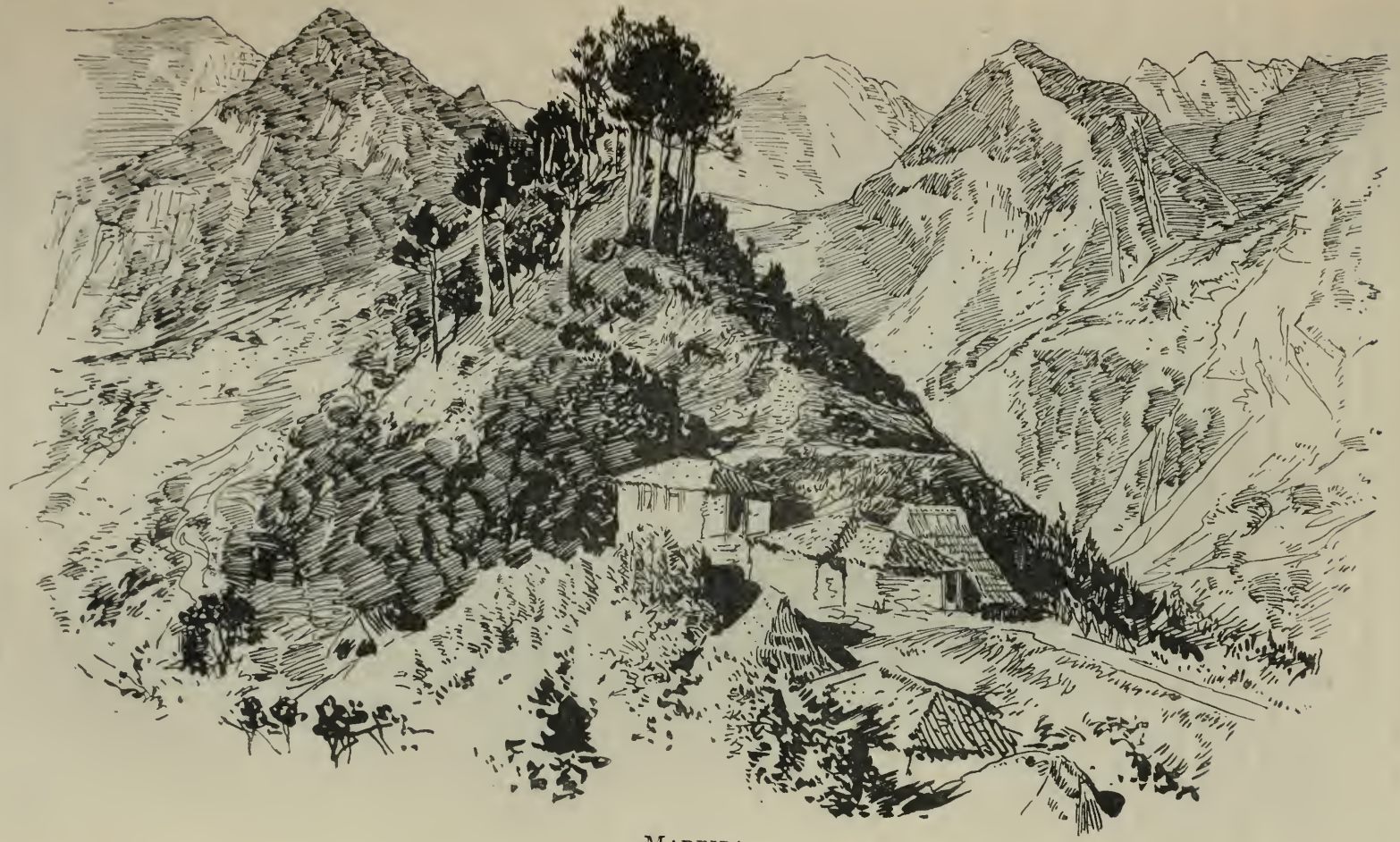
Your last argument would have prevailed, but, alas, it was too late. For good or ill, for better for worse, the die was cast, our passage was taken. H.—not the H. of your remembrance, who, as you know, is now in India, but another H.—would have been heart-broken at any change of plans: he much wished to see South Africa: wished for a sea-voyage, and the experience of crossing the line, though the days and the charms of tarring and feathering are happily as extinct as the dodo. To disappoint him was out of the question.

And then there was the one great inducement—the search for health: a rather forlorn hope, but what drowning man will not cling to a straw? A sea voyage had always done wonders, though I had never been so hard hit as now. INFLUENZA, you know, had laid its fatal hand upon me. Life had lost all *couleur de rose*, and seemed henceforth a "dreary, tenantless mansion." A voyage to the Cape was said to be the great remedy. Every one returned from it as strong as a lion; a giant refreshed: satirical comparisons, for I could never roar at the best of times, and there were no giants in the days when I first looked upon the world; but I took the remedy for granted.

As usual, those friends were most emphatic in their advice who knew least about the matter. But the die was cast, and the day of departure arrived.

Meanwhile, as I could not come to you, you bound me to a promise to keep you *au courant* of my movements; to write frequently a full and faithful account of our wanderings; the adventures we went through, the dreams we realised, the disappointments we met with; all the incidents of travel which make up the lights and shades of one's days and hours.

I made the rash vow, and you once remarked that we both hold a



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promise sacred. From time to time you will receive a budget as voluminous probably as any I ever acknowledged from my friend Dorothy Boscawen, but with no such interesting and momentous postscript.

On revient à ses premières amours: but to few can the experience and opportunity be given. I ought to have told you, in conclusion of my story, that I put in an appearance on that memorable 1st of November, and shivered as I gazed upon the cold waters of Geneva's Lake. But friendship must make sacrifices, and that was before the days of INFLUENZA. I gave Dorothy away into good keeping: and she left the church Lady D. Presently I found that I had not lost a friend but gained one, and she has *carte blanche* in the matter of correspondence. She is more happy than is the general lot of mortals: and a son and heir, now rising four, has been vouchsafed to them: the pride of his father's heart, the idol of his mother's. Both previous marriages had been childless: and a child coming somewhat late in life, seems especially *Dieudonné:* so they have called him Theodore.

As far as our voyage is concerned, we began at the beginning; it seemed well to go through the whole experience. This means, that instead of joining the vessel at Southampton, as most of the passengers do, we started from Blackwall. To miss going down the river and the channel, is to lose almost the very best and most interesting part of the journey. You have the whole vessel to yourself; and there is not the unpleasantness of going down with the special train, and finally reaching the ship on a tender as crowded as an excursion steamer.

We were to start on the Friday morning at seven o'clock, therefore had to be on board overnight.

We had undertaken a delightful charge; nothing less than the care of our old friend Mrs. S., who was going out to the Orange Free State on a visit to her son, unseen for many years. She is as charming and pretty an old lady as ever was found in this world; and though seventy-five, is as active and bright as a young woman. But she belongs to the E.'s of Norfolk, who are proverbially in their prime at eighty. Their grandfather, who lived in the last century, entertained kings, and was a monarch himself in his way. When he died he left twenty-one children to mourn him, though to each the consolation of a large fortune.

Mrs. S. had been going out in an earlier vessel, but changed her plans in order that we might have the pleasure of escorting her. She also came down on the Friday night. Other friends went down with us, so that we had quite a dinner-party on board. The loving cup went round, and some of us did not forget to drink to absent friends.

Our vessel was the *Dunottar Castle:* the finest vessel of a very fine line: the Castle Packet Line: of which Sir Donald Currie is head and chief. A magnificent ship, but chosen chiefly because she was in

command of our old friend Captain Robinson. We felt sure of our ground, and knew what we were doing; it was no leap in the dark; with him in command all must be well.

The evening passed and our friends departed. We accompanied them to the station, and as the train steamed away, we wondered how much we should see and do before meeting again. In the darkness of the night we returned to the *Dunottar*, crossing the lock gates. In the distance she looked almost like a thing of life; a huge floating town, brilliantly lighted up from end to end; fitted with every luxury and modern improvement; every comfort, not in reason but beyond reason. If men have lost refinement in these days, they have grown luxurious and exacting. A dangerous age and rather a fatal sign.

Of the two state cabins on deck, one had been given to us; and as time went on and we entered the Tropics, we often wondered what those unfortunates did in the cabins below, with only just sufficient room to turn round in: two, three, or four in a cabin, as it might chance, and only one at a time able to dress.

The night passed, and before we were up the next morning, we had left the docks and were out in the river. We ought now to have been making good way under guidance of the river pilot, but there was a strange stillness on board; no throbbing of the engines, no vibration, no evidences of a disquieting screw.

"How quietly she moves," I said to H. "If we are to have no more motion than this, what a voyage it will be! The *Dunottar* must be wonderfully built."

H. laughed: I am afraid at my expense. He has an intuitive genius for engineering, and finds out the why and the wherefore of everything whilst others are still asking all manner of questions, to the point or beside it. If he came over to Constantinople, he would discover all your magic, and expose its simplicity. Therefore never ask him, or keep your magic out of sight.

"We are not moving at all," he answered. "No vessel could travel as quietly as this, though great improvements will still be made in that direction. My own opinion is that they have made a mess of it up above, and we have begun our voyage ominously by sticking in the mud. Friday morning too," he laughed: "and sailors don't like sailing on a Friday. I suppose the rule applies to a steamer."

We went up to reconnoitre, and on the way encountered Mrs. S. looking as bright and beautiful and *bien mise*, as if her maid had just dismissed her from her own dressing-room at home. What a difference to life all this makes! She is one of those old ladies only England can produce. As she was one of the prettiest girls of her day—I have it on good authority—so is she one of the most beautiful of old women. A placid, perfect face, with charming features, and an expression in which one reads absolute goodness. Perhaps her greatest charm is her extreme refinement. She is now dressed as a widow, but wears a small white-net cap, so perfectly in order that

she must have brought a fresh one for every day. This is more becoming than the heavy weeds usually worn, which always seem to have a slight suspicion of heathenism about them. One does not like to be censorious, but it has often been remarked that the heavier the weeds, and the handkerchief border, and the deeper the note-paper, the less—— But I will not swell the number of the critical.

The lovely face of Mrs. S. and her charming voice greeted us, and made one feel almost at home on board.

"I suppose we are out in the river. How quietly we are going!" she cried. "No more motion than if we were on land. What a wonderful ship! Will it be like this always?"

"I don't think we are moving at all," said H. "I fancy we have stuck in the mud."

This abrupt announcement startled Mrs. S., who immediately had visions of being drowned or smothered, or at least run into by a barge and sinking. We proceeded in a deputation of three to the Captain's cabin. On this huge vessel it was quite a long walk.

We found H.'s opinion only too correct. We had started in a thick fog; the banks on either side were invisible; the fog-horn—they call it a syren, you know—blew its loudest, but the fog would not heed. Still, it kept the barges from running us down. Captain Robinson warned the pilot we should run aground, but the pilot, like the syren, would not listen. To foretell is to make happen. Before long, we did run aground. And there we were.

Captain Robinson was in a volcanic state, of which the danger might be estimated by his utter calmness. He would have torn his hair probably, but he had none to spare.

"And here we must remain for six hours from the time we stranded," he cried, "when the tide will float us off again. But the pity of it is that we shall lose our lovely run down Channel. Much of it now will have to be done in the night."

This was a disappointment to Mrs. S. who had never been down Channel. I think it was an equal disappointment to us, who had been down scores of times. The run has an attraction which never grows stale with custom, but the contrary. One never feels more loyal, more English, more proud of being English, than when steaming between the banks of our classic river, or passing down Channel in sight of the beautiful cliffs and shores of our favoured island.

To-day, however, one had to exercise patience. We were almost the only passengers on board, and it almost felt like being on one's own yacht.

In spite of the loss of time, the waiting was very pleasant. The fog had lifted, and the sun shone as warmly and brilliantly as if we had been in the Gulf of Naples, instead of the prosy Thames.

Yet that is a wrong adjective and untrue. The Thames is the reverse of prosy; its banks teem with industry, with signs of human life and interest. Sounds of activity reach you from its factories,

ship-building yards, and dry docks. There are buildings, old and tumbling down but inhabited, upon which Time has thrown its charm. There are tones that would drive an artist to despair: dark and ancient, every shade of black, that perhaps are more in harmony with a grey sky than with a blue, but are beautiful at all times. The wonders of antiquity abound, though not such antiquity as we rejoiced over in Cairo. Do you remember that night at the Tombs of the Caliphs, and the flood of moonlight which glorified the scene? Such experiences as these must not be looked for elsewhere. But comparisons are invidious, and these banks of the Thames have their peculiar charm. The day will come no doubt when they in their turn will be

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sad with the silence of decay and desertion—most melancholy of all sights—death where life was once abundant—but that day is still far off.

So this first morning on the bridge of the *Dunottar*, we three sat in patient waiting, thinking that our lives might have been cast in much less pleasant places. It must have been about noon, when we suddenly found ourselves once more floating and moving down stream. Our journey had commenced again. It was satisfactory to know that no harm had been done. A salmon coming up to London Bridge to see the world—if they ever do come up—might have knocked a hole into us with a lash of his tail; but nothing had happened.

We still hoped that a great deal of the run might be done by day-

light, but a second disappointment awaited us. At the mouth of the Thames we found another thick fog; and the pilot, having learned wisdom by experience, cast anchor. For another three hours we remained stationary, though not quite so *still* as when we were in the mud. Then the fog cleared, and cleared for good; we had no more misadventures. Henceforth our voyage was a long series of successes.

The next morning found us at anchor in Southampton Water.

Any one who chose to land could do so, in the small steam-launch. We did so for the sake of another momentary touch with Old England, another walk through the old town, which has its good and picturesque points, though largely diluted with ugliness. Mrs. S. would not land, declaring herself too old for steam-launches and unsteady gangways. She had said good-bye to England at Blackwall, and would have no second farewell.

With all her gentleness she is a woman of decision and character. The one loadstar of her life was her husband, who died not very many months ago. They were lovers—really lovers—to the very end. Nothing delighted them so much in their country rectory, where friends constantly came and went, as an empty house; a whole day, or two days, as it might be, in which they could be absolutely alone, all in all to each other. These experiences are rare, and should always be recorded. The world must be the better for them. One's faith in human nature—very much tried in these days—revives. All goodness we know comes from heaven, and in the end will conquer evil: but in the meantime, evil seems to have the ascendency. Mrs. S. is goodness itself, in human form.

So we landed without her, and once more looked up the few antiquities of the town, made sundry purchases of things forgotten at the last moment, provided ourselves with daily papers and weekly reviews, and returned as we had come, by the steam-launch.

Two hours afterwards, the tender was seen approaching, crowded with passengers: the population of a small town was taken on board, the great charm of the *Dunottar*—its quietness and yacht-like seclusion—dissolved and disappeared. That is the penalty of beginning the voyage at Blackwall: one starts under conditions that are too favourable: and as the passengers crowd on board—a collection of all sorts and conditions of men, women, and children, one cries out, "And still they come!"—growing the while more and more misanthropic. Happily, the mood diminishes, though never quite disappears.

At five o'clock everything was ready; gangways were withdrawn, the tenders departed; we weighed anchor, and once more the great throbbing, pulsing vessel, with all its human freight, was in motion: a floating town without doubt. If all went well we should not stop again until we were off the shores of Madeira.

We passed down by the Isle of Wight: through a dangerous channel unprotected by lights, where Captain Robinson declares some day a fearful accident will happen, and when many lives have been sacrificed

CAMARA DO LOBOS: MADEIRA.

people will awaken to their duty: and presently we parted from land, and darkness fell, and there was nothing to be seen but a wide black waste of waters calm as a mill pond, the starry heavens above, and this moving, throbbing, astonishing floating town.

It takes some days for every one to settle down comfortably (or uncomfortably) into their places on such an occasion as a voyage to the Cape: and an immense amount of thought and tact on the part of the Captain, assisted by the Purser, to place people together who shall mutually harmonise. To put, for instance, a refined lady by the side of a rough diamond, who is now worth half a million, but five years ago was not worth half-a-crown, and had knocked about the world as a jack-of-all-trades, would be to make two people wish the skies might fall. Or to place a learned professor going out to collect geological specimens and to examine closely into the excellent Cape Town Museum, next to a lady who may be the head of a "store" at Durban: and who, after a profound dissertation from the professor upon fossils and the different forms of strata that existed before the deluge, quietly asks whether geology is connected with the diamond mines of Kimberley or the gold mines of Johannesburg: is to play almost a practical joke upon two innocent people who, each in their way, are admirable members of society. With the best intentions in the world, small mistakes will sometimes happen, and it is then that tact has to come in and put things right, and make things smooth without offending.

On our voyage, I don't think any such errors occurred: and the days passed very pleasantly. I was one of the three to whom the "freedom of the bridge" was given, but the only one who made much use of the privilege. Having come out for rest and restoration, I spent most of my days away from the noisy crowd, installed in a comfortable lounge-chair, and letting the hours glide unconsciously. This was a matter of duty and conscience. It was absolute rest: and the most delicious feeling—as it always is at sea—was that you were out of reach of letters and telegrams. The passing days could bring no change; no work; there was an absolute cessation to one's interminable and never-ending correspondence: which after all, wears one out and breaks one down far more than one's actual *work*. The latter, by comparison, is easy and light and a recreation.

They were very pleasant days. Not a cloud in the sky, not a ripple upon the water; not a breath of wind, excepting such breeze as we made by our rapid motion. One almost longed for a little tempest to break the monotony, delightful as it was. No one thought of being ill. Even Mrs. S., who feared she should never leave her cabin during the whole voyage, was as well as any one, and more bright than most.

"I was too delighted to know that I should have your escort, and so were my boys, but I had no idea how much I should be able to enjoy it," she was polite enough to say. Her boys have long been

grown-up men, with sons and daughters of their own beginning to grow up too, but to her, if they lived to be a century old, they would still be boys. And they ought to be very proud of their mother, and give her all the devotion they can spare from their wives. Next to her husband, her boys have been all in all to her, and she declares that they are perfect, and have not a fault in the world.

But she has had wide sympathies with others also: hers has not been a narrow heart capable of only a few attachments. She has been a true mother to her village people, doing all she could for them, nursing them in sickness, out in all weathers. After one very severe case she was never the same: it undermined her energy. It seems almost impossible that so gentle a woman should have possessed so much vitality. Even now at seventy-five, she thinks nothing of walking ten miles, and of disdaining fatigue at the end. Every morning she comes up to the bridge by the Captain's invitation, and takes her seat beside me for an hour or more. We have long talks about mutual friends, and she tells me much of her past life and village incidents—some of which are village tragedies that would form the basis of many a romance: only people would say "This is impossible: such things never happen in real life:" sweeping condemnations that are untrue.

One morning, Mrs. S. laughingly said that she had not taken a return ticket.

"And yet you intend to go back to England in six months," we remarked.

"True," she replied. "But at my age, one never knows what may happen." She was speaking more seriously now.

"Yet you seem as well as you ever were in your life," we returned. "One would say you had life and energy enough for the next twenty years. Let us hope so."

"Oh no," she answered very gravely, "I don't desire it. And I have a presentiment that I shall not live long, though I should be sorry not to live to return and see my boys again."

"Surely you don't feel ill, or failing," we said, looking steadily at her sweet face, the picture of quiet health and repose. "I quite envy your energy; you seem never to feel tired, whilst I never feel anything else."

She laughed. "At your age, one's energies return; and yours will return," she replied. "But at mine—not that I feel ill, or failing, as you observe, but I have a presentiment. Don't you think that old people gain an extra sense, and see things more clearly than others? The material is fading, and the spiritual grows nearer." *

* It may be well to state here that Mrs. S. did not live to return; thus we are able to publish what we had written about her, and to speak much more openly of her goodness and virtues: she would have been the last to seek the praise of men. Two severe shocks, coupled with the somewhat trying climate, and the life which after all was so different from

So the mornings passed. At the end of an hour she would quietly flit away to the other end of the vessel, and spend her days in working and reading, and conversing a little with some of her fellow passengers. Every one was very anxious to do honour to the charming old lady.

At dinner time we would meet again, but then conversation was more general. The Captain headed his table : I sat at his left hand ; Mrs. S. sat between H. and me. Opposite to us sat Sir James and Lady Sivewright, Lady Sivewright at the Captain's right hand ; next to Sir James, Lady Sivewright's sister. You can now picture us. I owe Sir James Sivewright a debt of gratitude. By his knowledge of the country, he has mapped out a line of route which will enable us to make the very most of our limited time on land, so that we shall see almost everything of interest within certain boundaries. He has also given us numerous introductions even to people in remote parts, which will no doubt be of great use to us.

Revenons à nos moutons : the French, you know, call the little white waves upon the sea *moutons*, amongst other names. Not that we had any in our voyage, from the first day to the last. Day after day was nothing but a brilliant, cloudless sky ; and night after night, brilliant with flashing stars.

At last early one morning, when almost every one was still in bed, there came a sudden stopping of the engines, a ceasing of all sound, a casting of the anchor.

I know nothing more awful than this sudden ceasing of sound at sea, if you are not prepared for it. The silence may be felt ; one listens in agony for the next act—the crack of doom, an explosion of the boilers, foundering and disappearing for ever ; the end of all things—whatever is most terrible and calamitous. A thousand possibilities rush through the mind in a moment of time ; and you fear to ask the meaning of this terrible suspension of life and movement. To how many thousands of "care encumbered men" has not such a moment come as the last of all? But this morning we were prepared.

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her English life, proved too severe a test for her highly-strung nerves. The first shock arose from seeing her son, as she supposed, killed within a hundred yards of her in a carriage accident. The carriage was smashed to pieces, but the son marvellously escaped unhurt. The second fright arose from the house in which she was living being set on fire. The next day she was taken ill with fever, and in a week her bright spirit had left earth for its more fitting Home. A few days before the accident, before she fell ill, or they had the slightest idea that her hours were numbered, her son photographed her. The first and second attempts were failures, the third time was a success, a day or two elapsing between each trial. "I am glad it is successful," she said ; "otherwise *you would have been too late*." Almost as if some mysterious second sight had warned her of what was about to happen. After she was gone they remembered her words.

"Madeira!" cried H. "And I meant to be out on deck."

We had been up some time and were almost ready, and in a few minutes were gazing upon the far-famed island.

Short as the moments had been, already boats were swarming round us, and merchants or pedlars were coming on deck with their curiosities to tempt the unwary with the new and the strange; loaded with all sorts of things from parrots to photographs and from Madeira chairs to Madeira embroidery. Mrs. S. presently, after we had returned from the island, astonished us by wholesale purchases made in the largeness of her heart, of which she was the victim. "Poor things!" she cried when one protested against extravagances only

HASTY VIEW WE TOOK OF THE 'DUNOTTAR CASTLE,' FROM FUNCHAL.

worthy of those who were going out to open a "store": "poor things! See what trouble they have! how poor they look! how disappointed they would be! I wish I could buy up all they have."

"You are as bad as the Brothers Cheerible!" I said, charmed against my better judgment.

"That sounds like Dickens," she laughed. "I never could read Dickens, and know nothing about the Brothers Cheerible. Were they disagreeable people, or only eccentric? I hope I am neither."

But this was later on. When we had first left our cabin, she was already on deck, talking to Captain Robinson.

"We have some time to wait here," he said as we joined him. "You must land, and I will land with you and show you all the

wonders of the place. Mrs. S., if you will accompany us, we will draw up a legal document undertaking to bring you back safely. We will escort you up to the Monastery, and you shall toboggan the whole way down the mountain. They are an hour going up, only ten minutes coming down. Imagine the delightful sensation!"

"I will imagine it with pleasure," laughed Mrs. S., "but nothing more. I am too old even to land; and as for tobogganning—Captain Robinson, you are making fun of me. Here I mean to remain, quite satisfied with my present view of Madeira."

And I almost think she had the best of it. From our present position, it looked imposing and picturesque. The town, with its white houses, stretched far and wide upon the plain, almost on a level with the sea-shore. Behind, rose the magnificent hills towering to a great height in long unbroken outlines. Narrow promontories of rock, like small harbours, jutted out into the sea. Beyond these, mountains of rock rose precipitously out of the water; and against these mighty bulwarks, the ocean in stormy weather beats and lashes itself in a vain fury: the bulwarks do not even tremble.

Inland, the hills rise in sharp peaks and jagged outlines: hills as wild and beautiful, with their ravines and passes and luxuriant vegetation, as any to be found elsewhere; but they are not visible from the water. White houses are dotted about far up the slopes, many of them the residences of merchants whose days are spent in the hot, enervating offices and warehouses of the town: and who escape to these "mountain fastnesses," to freedom and happiness and fresh air, when the business of the day is over. Surely if it were not for this, many would die; for if Madeira is a city of refuge to the delicate, to the saving and building up of many a life, to the strong and healthy it must often bring the seeds of illness and death. From our vessel, it looked an earthly paradise, and one longed for a nearer acquaintance, and a longer sojourn.

The one was at once within our power. Mrs. S. remained firm to her determination not to land; she was wise; and we departed under Captain Robinson's guidance, who is a host in himself: H. anxious for the promised tobogganning.

Like Lisbon, Madeira—or shall we say Funchal, the actual town though the one word implies the other—looked charming from the sea: and like Lisbon much of its charm evaporated as soon as we landed. What we found most fault with were the narrow, tortuous streets, close and not very odorous, paved with smooth cobble stones, hard end uppermost, with no additional pavement on either side for pedestrians. The vehicles of the place are, for the most part, a sort of sledge drawn by oxen, with a white covering overhead as a protection from the sun: strange and unfamiliar modes of locomotion to any one landing for the first time, but certainly picturesque.

Most of these sledges are provided for visitors arriving by the

steamers ; and before long, if you remain on board, you will see a long procession of them, well freighted, winding their slow course up the steep hillside to the Monastery, there to retrace their steps by the breathless process of toboganning down, the illustrious fame of which has become world-known. Why it is called the Monastery I know not, for monasteries no longer exist in the island. Perhaps one existed there once, but we saw neither building nor ruins.

Monasteries and convents came to an end by "Act of Parliament" about the year 1834 or 1835. The monks were unceremoniously scattered and sent about their business ; and from recluses had to become hewers of wood and drawers of water ; a wholesome change.

Wine Store, Madeira.

The nuns received greater consideration ; a people noted for the gallantry could do no less. They were allowed to remain cloistered, until one after another passed from a silent world into the Silent Land. Some lived long, as if to tax the patience of their persecutors. One, indeed, is said to exist still. Imagine her age and solitary life ! In those days she must have been a fair young girl, with life all before her : perhaps a busy life and happy ; an adored wife, the mother of lovely children : had she not chosen the death-in-life of convent walls.

We saw no Monastery. All we did see was a church—the Mount Church—Nossa Senhora do Monte, to give you its full name. It is

said to have been built in the fifteenth century, but possesses none of the beauty of fifteenth century architecture: ugly within and without; stiff, cold and chilling; a few dreadfully painted pictures, and an image of the Virgin loaded with tinsel, much thought of and much visited because of miracles said to have been worked there.

But however ugly the church, the views from it are magnificent. You look down from a height of 2000 feet, upon hill-slopes richly cultivated; with occasional houses reposing in gardens gorgeous with flowers of every description, with tropical plants and drooping trees; the magnolia, with enormous branches and countless flowers, conspicuous amongst them.

Far down lies Funchal, with its churches, narrow streets, and public gardens. Beyond lies the harbour and rock-bound coast in picturesque outlines; the wonderful, far-stretching sea gleaming and shimmering in the sunshine, changing every moment as the slight breeze caresses its surface. It would be difficult to imagine a more lovely view; and yet we are told that it is as nothing compared with some of the views of this favoured island. In other parts, away from the sea, you meet with deep gorges, formed no doubt by tremendous earthquakes in days when Madeira was still unknown and uninhabited. There are dripping rocks and bubbling streams, all amongst the huge cracks and crevices of these wild and precipitous ravines; and above them tower the peaked hills, hill after hill pine-clad, luxuriant, reaching in some instances to a height of 6000 feet.

Something of all this we saw to-day: sufficient to be able to imagine all that had to be left unseen. Out there in the offing was our steamer, and she would wait no one's pleasure.

We had landed in a small boat—every one has to do so on arriving at Madeira. It is charming enough in fair weather; but "it is not always May."

As soon as we had landed some of the charm evaporated. The air was close and enervating, though still early morning. One felt that to live here would mean death. How do people bear it year after year, finding energy for work and ambition and success? It might be better up in the hills, but down here it was terrible. As yet the shops were not open, and many shutters of private houses were closed. There had been a fête the day before, and houses and streets were garlanded and festooned with flowers and evergreens, a still charming effect, even when garlands and glory were dead. After some days of sea, all this green of Nature was wonderfully refreshing. The creepers upon houses and hanging over garden walls were of all colours, gorgeous and lovely in the extreme. Flowers grow in reckless profusion, and boys came to us with bouquets larger than our hands could hold, which might have become ours for a penny. They began by asking a shilling it is true, but upon the principle of the Dutch auction gradually came down to the smaller coin. In the town itself we saw scarcely a redeeming feature. It has no architectural

points whatever. The churches are ugly and uninteresting; if any fine public buildings exist, we did not see them. The streets are narrow, all up and down hill, and paved with those smooth cobbles that make walking in thin boots a martyrdom.

We chartered a carro or sledge and started for the Mount Church. Every one who does not walk has to travel by sledge, or by hammock. There is only one macadamized road on the island, and that is quite modern and only about six or seven miles long: leading to Camara do Lobos, a somewhat ancient fishing village, with lovely rocks stretching out to sea, and precipitous heights rising out of the water, and a wonderful natural harbour, where boats may shelter in safety, and on fair days put out with their white wings spread; and life passes in a quiet paradise. Otherwise the village has no great attractions, and hitherto has not been very much visited. Now it will become the fashionable drive and promenade of Funchal. But the fact of its having no roads shows how primitive the island still is, or else how backward the authorities.

All the peasantry we met were civil and obliging and by no means stupid-looking. The men were slightly built, active and supple, not tall, but often very handsome, with well formed features of the Spanish type, dark hair, and dark, flashing eyes.

The sledges are all drawn by bullocks, who show the most sublime deafness when urged onwards, are callous to whips and prods, and shockingly indifferent to what sounded to us like very frightful swearing. Perhaps they were only Spanish terms of endearment, but we doubted. Every nation has its own way of doing things. Whenever a steamer comes in in the afternoon, the drivers of these carros reap a rich harvest, and the road up to the Mount Church rivals a miniature Derby day in England. This morning we had it almost to ourselves, which was agreeable.

We met a good many peasantry on the road, all proceeding towards Funchal. It was market day, or a saint's day; something at any rate which caused all to visit the town who were not too far away from it. One party we met were moving along, some twelve or fourteen of them, headed by a man playing a musical instrument they call a machête, the whole group singing and dancing as if life were all laughter and frolic and champagne.

> "Away with melancholy, while time is on the wing,
> We can't prevent its flying,—so merrily merrily sing
> Fal-lah!"

Probably they knew nothing of the old sweet song, though unconsciously acting it to perfection. The instrument, too, which was not badly played, sounded well amidst the surroundings of gardens and orchards with an ever-rising background of luxuriant hills.

Luxuriance of vegetation, indeed, redeems the island, and ought to make it rich and flourishing. The vine grows to perfection, having to a great extent conquered the disease which a few years ago seemed

to fall like a blight upon the world's vineyards. One of the interesting sights of Madeira are the places where the wine barrels are stored: large long rooms, covered over with a substantial open trellis-work, upon which the vines are trained. Here droop in their season the luscious bunches of grapes, protected by a thick carpet of graceful vine leaves, through which the sun glints and gleams, throwing upon wall and barrel and floor lovely tracings of leaf and fruit. The oxen move about, harnessed to a small sledge-like, plough-like construction, which transports the barrels to their given destinations. We all know the charm of good old Madeira that has been round the world in a sherry cask!

You may also find field after field of every species of grain; acres and acres of yams, and of the tall, picturesque sugar-cane. Up many a hill-slope, adorning many a valley, grows the vine. Of flowers, in their place, there is no end. They spring up with a profusion and a rapidity which tempt one to be almost wasteful. What need to spare to-day that which returns to-morrow? Every species of fern thrives in the open air—thanks, partly, to the Gulf Stream; and for a shilling you may carry away sufficient to stock a winter garden in England.

Thus Madeira is a paradise; but unfortunately its most charming spots are the uninhabitable.

You cannot live in a bubbling stream, or under a dripping well, or on the precipices of a wild but lovely gorge; or on the top of the Grand Curran, with its marvellous outlines of a human face to startle you into wondering for a moment, whether you are in a land once inhabited by giants, who have become fossilized. It is a perfect outline of a beautiful female face: and seems about to utter a blessing, upon the world: the expression is too soft and charming, the lips too mobile, for anything but *goodness*. No sphinx-like mystery, no doom or portent.

This same Gulf Stream, as you probably know, gives to Madeira its temperate climate. The stream separates at the Azores, those matchless islands of the Atlantic, and passing southwards takes Madeira and the Canary Islands on its return journey to Central America. The climate of Madeira is thus made as equal as any in the world; its coldest months, January and February, being still too warm and relaxing for a healthy European.

We made way in spite of our phlegmatic oxen. It was not at all an unpleasant mode of travelling, reclining as it were in easy-chairs, and gliding over the smooth cobbles very nearly as evenly as over ice or snow. Every few minutes the men passed soft rollers under the sledge, which kept the metals well oiled, and assisted locomotion. But it was uphill work the whole way, and every now and then a halt was commanded, in order that men and beasts might take breath. More often than not, as if purposely planned, the halt occurred near a dead wall covered with flaming gorgeous creepers, upon which one could only gaze, lost in admiration at the inexhaustible richness and

beauty mother earth is capable of producing. An hour's halt would have been too little to give to these glorious visions. In due time we reached our destination: not the end of the road by any means, but the limit of our time: and mounted the long flight of steps to the church, to inspect this fifteenth century deception, and to revel in the marvellous surrounding view.

Then presently the oxen were unharnessed, the sledge was turned

PEASANT: MADEIRA.

round, and our two "drivers," each holding a long rope attached to the right and left corners of the sledge, were ready for the descent. When we were ready also, we prepared for the wonderful feat of tobogganning down.

But no sooner had we started and realized our horrible position, than our hair stood on end with terror. We called to the men to stop; we might as well have commanded the sea to roll backwards.

Away we went at the pace of an express train; away flew the men, as if a very demon of demons were giving chase, and it was a case of flying for dear life. To all appearance nothing on earth could prevent us from being smashed to pieces.

How they turned all the sharp corners will for ever remain a mystery. Once or twice we came into contact with a stone wall—and it was not the wall that suffered. We swung almost completely round and the men with a shout and a vigorous application of arms and ropes, swung us back again, and away we went faster than ever, no breath left in our body, a twelvemonth's nervous power thrown to the winds.

H. was wicked enough to laugh. "Are you still alive?" he asked when we were half way down, in a voice which sounded very far off, on the very confines of another world, just after our first point of contact with a stone wall. And one could only answer: "A doubtful point."

"Do you think you will be alive when we reach the bottom?" he wickedly continued: and one could only reply, so horrible was the situation: "We fear it is possible."

Houses, gardens, walls, creepers, flew past us, as telegraph poles fly past a train. Peasants seeing us coming turned and fled, others backed into walls and looked after us with such an expression as we look into a mighty yawning chasm, and wonder how we should feel if we were rolling into the blackness of unseen depths. At least so we interpreted the situation.

But it came to an end; I thought we had been a week on this horrible journey; a week of nightmare. I looked at my watch—we had been just nine minutes. It had taken us an hour and a quarter to go up.

"Has my hair turned grey?" I asked anxiously of H.

"Not more grey than it was before," he ruthlessly replied. "Wasn't it perfectly heavenly? I wish we had time to do it all again."

For a moment I thought the wild flight had turned his brain; but his eyes were sane, and his expression was calm.

"Good travel down, sir," said the men. "Very fast travel, sir. Good sledge, sir; good men, sir. Worth good money, sir."

Then I realized that cruelty is not dead. I was in the minority. I gave it up and held my tongue; and paid for my experience. If the men had asked for gold, silver, and precious stones, I was in a condition to deny them nothing.

One thing I was thankful for—Mrs. S. had not landed with us. When we returned on board, there she was, surrounded by purchases and a small crowd, looking as happy as if she had bought up all the poverty of the world and made every one comfortable for the rest of their lives.

Captain Robinson looked grave.

"There will be a famine of dry goods in Madeira, and you will

CAPE TOWN.

be answerable for the consequences," he said. And taking the law into his own hands, he returned to the salesmen various objects which would only have been an incumbrance at the end of the journey. "Poor things! poor things!" cried Mrs. S. "Imagine their disappointment. Look at their expressions. They will think you a hard-hearted monster."

"I don't know what they will think *you*," he laughed. "I assure you these men are quite rich and flourishing out of the bargains they make whenever a vessel touches at Madeira: and all these things, which would only have been a nuisance to you, they will sell either to-day before we start, or to-morrow to the next vessel that drops anchor here."

But if they sold anything more that day they must have been speedy in their movements and decisive in their bargains, for before very long we had weighed anchor, and Madeira began to recede and grow dreamlike.

"And now," said Captain Robinson, "the real voyage begins. No one really settles down until after Madeira. Now for organising games, sports, balls, concerts and general flirtations. I do my best by issuing laws against the latter, but my subjects on this one point are guilty of high treason."

For my own part, I felt as if all interest in everything was over for ever. I had returned with one of my worst, most intense headaches, and for the second time that day really thought I should have died. Rest and quiet, however, an easy couch in the Captain's cabin, a little champagne and a great deal of sympathy from the Commander—which he must have inherited from his mother, herself a country rector's wife with large demands for ever upon her for that same divine quality—and a few hours brought life to its more ordinary condition.

And now, I have reached the limits of my letter and if I have anything more to add about the voyage, it must come to you in my next.

One Monday morning dawned when a general observation went round the vessel: "To-night we shall be in Cape Town." Expressions changed. Every one looked eager and interested and expectant. People began to think of themselves, their own individual interests. The boardship friendships of the voyage were loosening. Many were about to separate, never to meet again. There was a grand "redding up," as the country-folk say, of cabins; a gathering together of scattered articles; one steward looked after his library, another duly presented his wine bills.

Very many on board knew what was coming; they were returning home to certain prospects and settled occupations—in some cases counting their hoards not by hundreds, but by hundreds of thousands. To others it was a new land, and the unknown lay before them. They had nothing but hope, and youth, and energy to sustain courage; had probably left, in the old country, hearts which beat for them and eyes that had shed bitter tears at their departure. But man goes forth

HARBOUR, CAPE TOWN.

until the evening: men must work and women must weep: and without doubt by and by there will be a great exodus to this new world of South Africa, whose untold resources are only beginning to open out. The country is in its first infancy; it has a mighty manhood before it; an almost inexhaustible future; countless riches upon its surface as well as beneath it. Of those on board to-day, how many would succeed, how many fail? One thing seemed certain: given energy, steady conduct, perseverance, and the word failure might be blotted out of their dictionary. The reason that so many have to confess themselves beaten is almost always the same: they will look too much upon the wine cup when it is red. It is the curse of the world, which finds it easier to abstain than to be moderate.

The eventful day passed. Evening came, twilight began to fall, and land was before us.

More and more clearly the outlines of the coast were discerned. Lighthouses here and there began to flash out their warnings. Table Mountain, from being a dream, became a reality, rising broad and gigantic out of its watery setting, a sky clear and blue, lovely and serene above it. As we approached, the magnificent mountain grew more imposing; beautiful and curious in form; the summit flat and smooth as a table: on which a passenger, to whom South Africa had proved a mine of wealth, suggested that a colossal statue to some great man should be placed. One shuddered at the number of cycles it would take to make such an image!

Then darkness fell, and the stars came out, the disappointing Southern Cross and the magnificent Scorpion conspicuous amidst the constellations. In the plains below Table Mountain reposed Cape Town, all its lights flashing out in the dark night. One hospitable mansion sent up coloured fires and rockets by way of welcome; and no doubt it was spread, from house to house that the *Dunottar Castle* had arrived at least twelve hours before she could have been expected, beating all previous records.

It was a question whether it would be possible to enter the harbour that night, but a short consultation between the Captain of the *Dunottar* and the Captain of the Port, and the signal was given to proceed. Like a gigantic thing of life, without the slightest hitch, swerving not an inch to right or left, the vessel passed between the narrow gates into the wide waters, and with all majesty and dignity, full of calmness and repose, slowly moved up to her berth alongside. The engines ceased throbbing, the screw was at rest.

Then came a great cheer; the voyage was over. For some the old life was taken up again; for others a new life had begun.

THE CHRISTMAS KNOCK.

"IT is a queer thing," said Adelaide Chaloner meditatively; "for I am not a superstitious person—you will all of you own that I am not superstitious—but I cannot help listening for the Christmas knock."

"What next, I should like to know?" spoke up Phœbe in her pert way. "I thought we were all old enough to have outgrown that nursery nonsense, and you are not the youngest of us, Lyda!"

This was an aggressive remark. Lyda, otherwise Adelaide, was well aware that she neither was nor looked so young as her two unmarried sisters, and she did not like it. Phœbe knew she did not like it, and so did Gwyn. Gwyn came across to the fire, leaving her music-copying for the sake of preserving peace, and knelt down by her sister.

"Why should we laugh at the old tradition as nursery nonsense? It always used to make me feel so nice and respectable to have a proper legend in the family; superior to the rest of the girls who had, so to speak, no ancestral furniture. If Lyda does not think me too childish, I should like nothing better than to sit here on the hearthrug and have her tell me the story over again."

Gwyn's voice was persuasive, and Christmas Eve is a time when no one is sternly set on doing an evening's work. The firelight was strong upon the hearthrug, and the pleasant glow encouraged sociability and comfortable idleness. Lyda was not proof against the united charms of Gwyn, the season, and the firelight.

Phœbe, for all her scornfulness, drew up with her beehive chair, and the stocking that she was knitting, and made the third in the sisterly group. It was a trio by no means unattractive to look upon, though none of the three was a beauty. They were like, and yet unlike, as sisters often are, with fair complexions, eyes of varying grey, and hair that refused to be classified. It was neither dark nor light, and the sunny glints were more golden in Gwyn's, more ruddy in Phœbe's than in Lyda's. Their expression varied too; Lyda was sedate—a little too sedate, said her friends, and Phœbe did not hesitate to call her prim; Gwyn was dreamy; Phœbe quick and impertinent. Even now she wore a lively and half-expectant look, as she gave a divided attention to her sister's story, and the bustle in the little street without.

"It feels so odd to be trying to tell that old old story over again," spoke Lyda in a deprecatory voice. "Still, as you say, Gwyn, it is nice to have a legend in the family, and if it has to die out, we may

as well let it die hard. We cannot hope to have the experience continued in the female line."

She paused a moment, and Phœbe smiled iniquitously at Gwyn. She knew that Lyda was once more sitting in judgment on backsliding cousin George, who ought to have made love to Gwyn, but married a shop girl instead—though she turned out to be a poor curate's daughter and really well-educated and ladylike—thereby, in Lyda's opinion, cutting off his right to the very name of Chaloner. Gwyn glanced back a nervous reproof. Lyda continued :

"You know that we have to go back many generations to reach the origin of the Christmas knock; as far as the far-off days of Charles the Second. The Chaloners lived then at Hardwell Manor, and old nurse Fawcett used to profess that she remembered the house still standing, not an utter ruin, in her young days. It stood a little back from the main road, some half mile out of the town, with a broad drive overshadowed with beech trees leading in a sweeping curve from the road to the great entrance porch, and on to the road again. The Chaloner then living was a shrewd and prudent man, with a wife not only shrewd, but shrewish, and the two were of one mind with regard to saving their money, and not risking their own comfort or advantage for the sake of their neighbours.

"They had kinsfolk, but no very near relations; and well-to-do though they were, they never saw their way to giving anything or showing any hospitality to mere kinsfolk. Even Christmas found them keeping the feast with never an invited guest."

"Just as we are," put in Phœbe.

"One Christmas Eve they sat as usual, one on each side of their comfortable hearth, in their straight-backed but nevertheless comfortable chairs, counting over the gains accumulated during the year that nad so nearly drawn to an end, and congratulating themselves on their successful adventures. It was a snowy night, with a wind blowing stormily at intervals and bringing a fitful melody of bells from the neighbouring church.

"On a sudden, louder than the wind and louder than the bells, rose a sound of shouting, hooting and yelling. The Chaloners started; the sound was coming their way and they knew not what should cause it. Nearer and nearer came the tumult, and amongst the shouting they could soon distinguish words. 'Catch the witch! There she runs! Catch her! Down with her! Drown her!'

"Squire Chaloner stirred in his chair. 'The rascals!' he said easily. 'They are hunting Old Moll again. Small harm done if they do give her a ducking;' and Madam Chaloner added her righteous assent. But on and on came the tumult, and nearer and nearer the flying footsteps, ringing clear on the frozen road too thinly covered with snow for the sound to be deadened. 'The old witch runs fast,' commented the Squire, and disturbed himself no further. Still the steps came on, and now they rang with a different echo on the

stone floor of the porch. Frantic hands struck desperately on the door, a voice cried out in loud appeal, 'Good Christian people, save me! Let me in! For the love of Christ give me refuge!'

"Surely the voice was strangely strong and clear for wizened, smoke-dried Moll; but the Chaloners did not stir. Let the devil guard his own, they said comfortably enough, and when their servants would have flung open the door, Madam went forth and angrily forbade them. Still that clear voice pleaded in agony without, and still the hands beat wildly on the door; but the steps of the pursuers were close upon the pursued; they barred her exit from the porch; there was no salvation unless the door was opened.

"Hoarse voices sounded in the porch, rough hands were laid on the victim's shoulders; she shrieked again in desperate appeal: and still the door stayed closed.

"Then above the riot rose a wild shrill voice, fierce in its denunciation. 'As you of leathern hearts, have closed your doors against me, an innocent victim, so shall the hearts of all mankind be closed against you till ye die. And as you have thrown away a chance for your salvation, so shall each one of your descendants be likewise tempted, and shall save or lose himself according to the innocence of his soul.'"

"Good gracious!" cried Phœbe, genuinely startled, 'there's the knock!"

They listened, heard nothing, and Lyda went on:

"With the morning came their kinsman John Chaloner, a man well reputed though not rich in worldly gear. He asked them, sternly and hardly, what account they could give him of his daughter. She had gone forth on Christmas Eve to minister to the last wants of Old Moll, the reputed witch, had been set upon by the rabble, and they had told him that she had fled for refuge to the Squire. A deadly sickness seized upon the Squire. He knew that this man had not come for information. He stammered out that the old witch Moll had stormed at their door last night, and his wife had refused to open. Then John Chaloner laid his hand on the Squire's shoulder, forced him forth into the village, and to the entrance hall of his own room. There lay something on a bier. The outraged father raised the covering cloth, and Squire Chaloner gazed in fixed horror on the face of the fairest of all his kinswomen, waxen in death, and crowned with a glory of ruddy golden hair. He could not move till John Chaloner seized him again by the shoulder and thrust him from his door.

"'May her dying curse cling to your line for ever!' he breathed, bitterly, in the Squire's ear.

"Within the year Madam Chaloner died. A year later, and the Squire wedded again, a sweet and virtuous creature, the mother of our race. And two years after that he died himself in great agony, raving about John Chaloner's daughter and the doom that was in store for him."

"That is the knock, and no mistake about it!" quoth Phœbe, listening sharply.

Gwyn turned desperately pale, and tried to speak, but the words stuck in her throat. Nobody noticed her. Phœbe was too much excited, and Lyda too much unnerved by the sudden fulfilment of her expectations. There was a minute's pause, and then the knock came again.

"Somebody must do something, I suppose," said Phœbe. "I am not going to have Pleasance Chaloner's curse on my life, anyway. Unless you mean to make a fight for it, Lyda, I will open the door myself."

"For a runaway knock, perhaps," said white-lipped Gwyn with an attempt at carelessness, and again nobody heeded her.

Then Lyda rose, controlling her nervous agitation. Since they could not tell for which this chance had arisen, it was better that they should all go, she said, and forth they sallied into the hall, where all looked warm and cosy under the light of the red-shaded lamp.

Light-footed Phœbe was first at the door, and drew back the bolt with a clear ringing noise; Lyda turned the handle and opened, while Gwyn hung nervously in the background. It was not her chance, anyway, as Phœbe reminded her later.

Outside the world looked anything but warm. A scurrying wind drove the sleet in at the door, blinding Lyda's eyes for the moment to the presence of a tiny little man, who stood up bravely at her knee regardless of weather. When she had wiped off the sleet, and gazed out again with sheltered eyes, she still looked over his head, and started when Phœbe's laugh rang in her ear.

"Don't you see him, Lyda? The wee little chappie! I believe you are looking out for a man of your own size!"

Lyda looked down at this, but not quickly enough. The faltering Gwyn had come forward, stooped down, and gathered the little one into her arms.

"You darling!" she said ecstatically, between her kisses. "How do you come here on such a night as this?"

How indeed? Lyda asked the question more than once, as they petted the child over the drawing-room fire, but his tender years deprived him of the advantage, or disadvantage, of affording her an answer. He submitted with gracious dignity to their attentions, allowed the removal of his wet cap and coat, and relaxed from his manner of grave superiority when the glitter of the diamond drops in Lyda's ears caught his eye. Indeed he so far lowered himself as to give utterance to a crow of delight and make a grab at the brilliant ornaments, and that crow won Lyda's heart.

Old Sampson, the man-servant, was sent to the police station at once to give information of his mistresses' curious "find," and the police took up the matter warmly, but nothing resulted from their efforts. The individuals who had placed the child on the Chaloners' doorstep

had managed their business with such skill that no trace of them could be discovered. No tale was told by his handsome little fur coat, the rich dress beneath it, or even by the dainty underclothing.

"A foundling he is, ma'am," said Sampson with stolid wisdom, "and a foundling he will remain." Already Lyda desired nothing better.

There was a little dispute over the name by which he was to be known, for in spite of his activity and intelligence he was unable to make them understand his version of that which belonged to him by right. Gwyn suggested Theodore; Lyda thought nothing so appropriate as Noel; and Phœbe wanted to call him either Santa Claus or Moses, she did not mind which. She yielded with a grimace to the superior wisdom of her sisters, and allowed them to adopt Theodore for immediate use, with Noel in reserve by way of a surname, if he should stay with them long enough to need it. Theodore was speedily softened down to Tody by the merry baby lips, and everybody but Lyda knew him best as Tody the foundling.

Nobody objected to his residence under the Chaloners' roof. He was obviously not a child to be sent to the workhouse, both his dress and his manners showed that, and every one expected to find him reclaimed at any time, and certainly at no distant time, by his mysterious parents. The three sisters were in no hurry to have him thus reclaimed; he was a more than welcome inmate in their house.

But the following Christmas found him still there, more lively, more affable, more masterful than on his first arrival, and it occurred to Gertrude Frenche, the married sister, to object to the security of his position. She had brought her own two small children for a Christmas visit, and was not well pleased to see them take a decidedly second place in their aunties' affections. She made her protest against this impropriety to Lyda, who replied with ruffled dignity, that she believed she was quite capable of managing her own affairs and certainly her own household. She had always been considered a practical and responsible person; they would all of them own that she was in possession of her senses. After that utterance of the favourite formula, she retired from the combat and the anxious mother felt herself defeated.

A similar attack upon Gwyn brought the peace-lover nearly to tears. She was sure that she did not love Tody any more than he deserved, and she was quite sure that no one of them would do anything unjust.

Gertrude did not know how far the meaning of this remark might extend; again she retired and fell back upon Phœbe, who curtly told her to mind her own business.

It seemed to Gertrude that she was minding her own business, and it seemed to her moreover that her sisters had grown very disagreeable and mysterious.

They were equally little satisfied with her conduct, but Gwyn was the only one that took her remonstrances and insinuations to heart. She brooded over them after Gertrude and the boys were gone, and

the general result of her fits of meditation was some fresh gift to Tody. Whatever was wrong, he was not to blame, and it was hard that he should have to suffer for other people's mistakes. Master Tody would probably have taken the same view of the case if the matter could have been properly explained to him. As it was, he accepted the new sashes, the boxes of chocolate, the wooden horses and toy trains, with great magnanimity, and sustained his position as monarch of the household with gracious unconcern.

Everybody, from Lyda and old Sampson downwards, grew to ignore the possibility of the appearance of his parents. Gwyn had never cared to discuss the question, and Phœbe's suggestions had of course been always too flippant for Lyda to entertain them seriously. Tody and his future were frequently the theme of her discourse, but it was rather with her friends than with her sisters that she talked of them. It grew to be regarded as a settled thing that the little man was Miss Chaloner's prospective heir.

Summer came, and Tody was glorious in the possession of a mail cart and a boy to play with him all day ; that is, whenever there was none of his obedient aunties to wait upon his will. He preferred them, but good-humouredly put up with the inferior attendant ; and as no one complained, however often he needed a clean overall, he had really a royal time. The overalls, it is needless to say, were of choicest material and elaborately smocked by the hands of the said aunts. Everybody was satisfied but Gwyn, who still brooded, and Katie Frenche, Gertrude's young sister-in-law, who came to stay with the Chaloners and corresponded faithfully with her brother. Katie said nothing, but somehow Lyda came to the conclusion that their guest was not so nice a girl as she used to be.

Her visit was not long over before business, not clearly defined, brought John Frenche himself to the town. Naturally he took up his lodgings for the two nights with his wife's sisters ; they would have been offended if he had gone elsewhere. He also must have his say about the foundling.

About a week later Gwyn came into Phœbe's room in desperate distress. It took very little to drive her to desperation.

"Well?" questioned Phœbe blithely.

"It is not well. I am at my wits' end."

"A long journey that."

"And I wish I had never meddled in the thing at all."

"Which you may remember is precisely what I told you you would live to remark."

"But I could not foresee this ! Even you with all your penetration never suggested this. What are we to do, Phœbe?"

"My dearest Gwyn, will you kindly explain what somebody else has done? I imagine that a fresh card has turned up in the game."

"Lyda is gone to Mr. Forsyth to get a new will made!" said poor Gwyn helplessly. "John said something—stupid enough, no doubt

—that has rankled in her mind ever since, and she has suddenly come to the fixed resolve of leaving everything to Tody and not a penny to the little Frenches. John shall see that she is not to be dictated to; her money is her own to do as she will with, and no child of his shall ever touch a penny of it."

"Just like Lyda! Don't worry, my cherub; Mr. Forsyth won't let her make an idiot of herself."

"But Lyda never gives in, Phœbe. She always does know best, and if he will not do it she will go to some one else. It is horribly unjust; she has no business to cut out Johnnie and Wallie. Tody cannot be reckoned a relation, and it is all my fault. How could I be such a fool? And why—oh, why have we such a piece of nonsense in our family as that——"

"You would feel ever so much better if you finished up with 'confounded knock,'" spoke Phœbe, in a voice of kindly encouragement. "Being in such a pucker, why not cut the tangle by telling the whole truth to Lyda?"

"That is just what I dare not do. What would she say? She might turn Tody out, for it is her house, and if I went with him, there would be a scandal of course. I have money enough now, but we Chaloners cannot stand a scandal."

"Wherefore Lyda would be safe not to run the risk of raising one. She would make it hot for you, I daresay, though I think Tody's position is pretty secure. Do you want my sober advice? Then let things alone. If Lyda does make a will, the chances are that she will live to make another; and if by good or evil hap Tody should get her property—what a joke it would be!—we two could make some amends to the defrauded nephews."

"We might get married," objected Gwyn.

"We might; but you did not talk in that way when George made his humble application."

"I could not marry George when I knew he was in love with poor little Dora! Besides, I would not, any way."

Phœbe laughed, with malice in her laughter, and Gwyn tried to think that the whole world was not undone by her interference in the natural course of its affairs.

Lyda made the will. Mr. Forsyth remonstrated and her sisters remonstrated, and they might as well have held their peace. Lyda always did know best. However, she made no open mention of what she had done, not speaking of it to even her most intimate acquaintances, and none of the Chaloners ever knew how it came to the Frenches' ears. They did get to hear of it.

Gwyn, by hard self-persuasion, had lulled her troubled mind to rest. A certain correspondence that she had been carrying on privately helped her to that end, and she told Phœbe that she really thought she could hold out now.

Christmas Eve came round and the foundling enjoyed it thoroughly.

It was a twofold festival to him, since it did duty as a birthday as well, and he was therefore supplied with a double portion of delights. Everything that a four-year-old boy could desire, or that the tongue of a four-year-old boy could ask for, was provided for this night or the next; and Tody, sitting on Lyda's knee, inspecting one treasure after another, overflowed with happiness unalloyed.

It was a delicious picture; the three fair sisters bending admiringly over the bright and beautifully dressed boy formed a charming group against a background of whatever is most elegant and comfortable in the way of drawing-room furniture. The Chaloners had a very dainty taste in matters of dress and furniture, and Lyda's primness and Phœbe's recklessness mutually corrected one another to very good purpose. Suddenly the street door opened and shut abruptly, and the sisters had hardly exchanged looks of surprise and inquiry when their own door opened also, and some one entered who regarded room and occupants with anything but appreciation of their beauty.

"Good gracious, John!" exclaimed Phœbe, angrily, "how you startled us. I might have known who it was; nobody but you has that abominable habit of coming in without ringing."

Gwyn looked thoroughly frightened, but gained no relief in words. Lyda's speech was a mixture of stiffly polite welcome and anxiety as to the cause of his appearance at such an unexpected moment. Was anything wrong?

"Nothing," replied John, "is wrong with me or mine. It is on your own account that I am come, to open your eyes to the infamous deception that has been practised upon you, and to tell you whose child you are holding in your arms."

"Our own, by adoption," said Lyda, haughtily.

"And whose by birth? Whose but George Chaloner's? That very man who insulted you and all your family by his low imprudent marriage—a marriage that you vowed never to forgive, and that you ought never to forgive. When he found that the child was a burden upon him, he tried to palm it off upon you by trading on your superstition, and took you in completely. If you choose to keep the brat in your house another hour after knowing how you have been fooled, you are weaker than I took you to be."

"You may damage Tody's interests by your adjectives, John Frenche," flashed forth Phœbe, "but I scarcely think you will advance your own."

"You think?" said John, turning upon her with fierce emphasis. "Your sister is likely to value your opinion when she knows that you are in the plot against her."

Even Phœbe faltered at this attack, and Gwyn dropped down into the chair behind her. Lyda was dumb before this complication; rage against her sisters warred with rage against John, and she would not give either party the triumph of hearing her reproach the other. John prepared himself for a fresh onset, more fiery than before, and the

sight of his angry face woke such terror in the soul of Tody, the poor little bone of contention, that he turned with a fretful cry to hide his eyes against Lyda's velvet and lace. The familiar touch of the clinging fingers decided the course of his adopted auntie's wrath. She turned indignantly upon John.

"Your language is scarcely such as we are accustomed to hear," said she. "I do not wonder that the child is alarmed. If you can speak more moderately I am ready to hear whatever you may wish to say."

"You had better take him somewhere else to say it," said Phœbe hurriedly; "Gwyn has gone and fainted."

Poor Gwyn! There was surely never a worse conspirator, one more ill adapted to sustaining the burden of a secret. She had devised the whole of the childish plot, and now in the hour of need she collapsed and left Phœbe alone to fight it out. She received a sharp scolding from her aggrieved sister as soon as she recovered sufficiently to understand it; and Lyda, when summoned to hear the full confession, was so touched by the weakness and distress of her favourite sister, that she let her off far more easily than any one thought she deserved.

"I could not help it, Lyda," she said, holding her sister's hand and lying back half sobbing on the sofa. "You see I was wrong all through. It was not only that there was Dora, but I did not want George to make love to me; it might have been different if he had been encouraged. And so when Dora fell ill, and they had to go away and there was not money enough to take them, I felt it was my fault; I gave them all the money I could spare and all I could raise, and then there was not enough. They had to leave Tody behind, and we had no more money, so we cheated about the Christmas knock. I knew you could not help loving him when once he got his little arms about you, and we meant to tell you everything when they come back. Only Dora gets worse, and I do not think she will ever come back any more, and Matt has written——"

"Matt? Who is Matt?" questioned Lyda, more puzzled than pleased.

"Matt Bennett. You remember, he was George's friend," explained Gwyn, getting very hot about it. "He was too poor. I mean, he thought he could do better in New Zealand. And when George and Dora had to go away, he said they had better go to him, and he would see that they did not starve. Oh, Lyda! do not be angry with him and me!" she cried, sitting up, and linking her arm about her sister's neck. "There was not anything to tell you, he was so poor; and we just waited till there might be something to tell. But now Dora wants her boy, before she dies, and Matt is coming to fetch him, and—and I thought he would have been here before the secret was found out, to help me to tell you how badly I have treated you. When the door opened, I could not help hoping—and it was only John. Lyda dear, do speak to me! I am so sorry, so sorry!"

Lyda had so very much to digest in the way of unpleasant information that she knew not what course to pursue. She remembered Matt very well, and Matt's impecuniosity, and how Matt had gone forth with her good wishes for his prosperity and without her having the least suspicion of what his prosperity involved. She was nettled at the way in which she had been tricked, but Gwyn was abject in her pleading for pardon, and Gwyn was her favourite sister; and Matt seemed to be gathering wealth together, which was a thing to be considered, and which enabled her to remember that there had always been a corner in her heart for the easy-going boy.

It was John who had the worst of it. He was obliged to stay the night, and Phœbe had the privilege of saying whatever she pleased to him. It was not much better for him afterwards, when Lyda announced her intention of taking out Tody—otherwise Matthew Chaloner—in company with Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Bennett, and when the later news came that she was nursing "that person" back to life and health.

But she had made a fresh will before she left England, and Phœbe had charge of it till her return.

Tody simply adores his Auntie Lyda.

E. E. Kitton.

CLOUGH NA MOLLA!

Clough na Molla! the fire burns warm and bright,
I see thee slowly rise in its clear light;
Griefs, years, age vanish as I gaze on thee,
Crossed is the deep, and Time's still deeper sea.

Clough na Molla! I see a reddening sky,
Dark waving woods, a swift stream gliding by;
A rock that looks o'er a glen green and deep,
With grass-grown graves where the dead soundly sleep.

Clough na Molla! I hear the blackbird's song
Rise loud; I hear the bees' low hum among
The fresh wild flow'rs; I see, as wild as they,
A child who sits between two graves at play.

Clough na Molla! thou fadest in the gloom,
The fire burns low, dull and dark grows the room;
Again I sit a woman sad and lone,
Cold as the cold hearth whence the dream has flown.

Julia Kavanagh.

THE OLD LADY IN BLACK.

AN EPISODE OF MONTE CARLO.

I.

THERE was not under the stars a happier man than I, Frederick Luscombe, on a certain January evening in the year 1889, when, with my young wife on my arm, I ascended the steps of the Casino at Monte Carlo.

Young, healthy, and prosperous—my father was the head of an old-established Midland banking-firm—married, just a week ago, to the girl I adored, it really seemed that I had nothing left to wish for.

Georgie and I were spending our honeymoon at Nice, but had run over to Monte Carlo for the day, and strolled into the Casino "just to look at the tables."

We did not intend to play; we should be sure to lose, Georgie said, quoting the proverb: "Happy in love, unlucky in play."

So for the first half hour we contented ourselves with looking on, while a friend whom we had encountered at the hotel where we dined pointed out the different celebrities for Georgie's benefit.

It was her first visit, and she looked about her with eager interest and curiosity.

"I am disappointed," she declared at last. "I expected it would be a scene of wild excitement; but all these people look as dull and decorous as if they were in church, and there are no 'types' among them."

"Look at that face opposite," I whispered—"the old lady in black. Isn't she 'typical' enough for you?"

She was a tall, gaunt old woman, spectrally thin, with haughty aquiline features which had once been handsome, and haggard dark eyes, unnaturally bright. Her face was calm and inscrutable as a mask, but her lips looked dry and feverish, and the withered claw-like hand she stretched out to deposit her stakes shook with suppressed agitation.

"What a weird old woman!" Georgie murmured. "Who is she, I wonder? Captain Fergusson, who is that old witch, opposite?"

"That old witch, my dear Mrs. Luscombe, is the Princess Vera Zaterinski."

"'Princess'!"

"An authentic Russian Princess, widow of Prince Constantine Zaterinski, and one of the most inveterate gamblers in Europe. She has lost at play a princely fortune; has alienated children, relatives, and friends, and now is living miserably, Heaven knows how, with no

companion or attendant but that ancient serving-man in shabby livery who is standing behind her chair."

"What a life! It ought to be a warning to us," my wife said solemnly; and almost in the same breath added inconsistently: "Frederick, I think I should like to stake a louis—just one, to see how it feels. Of course I shall lose, but never mind!"

But, in spite of the proverb, she did not lose, and, encouraged by her unexpected success, played on till she had accumulated a little heap of notes and gold, which she showed us in laughing triumph.

"There, you have gambled as much as is good for you," I said at last, drawing her away. "Look at your opposite neighbour, and be warned in time."

"Ah! poor thing, I wish I could have given her my luck," my wife answered, glancing compassionately at the old Princess, who had been losing heavily.

Though outwardly calm and unmoved as ever, her face was deadly pale, and her hand, on the forefinger of which gleamed a massive gold signet ring, closed convulsively on the worn leather pocket-book, from which she had just extracted a hundred-franc note.

"I believe that is her last stake," Georgie whispered. "Oh, I hope she will win this time!"

But again the Princess lost.

She watched as the croupier carelessly raked in her note with the other losings, then rose abruptly, with a look of such dumb despair as I trust I may never see on a human face again.

The other players made way for her; there was a tragic dignity in her figure which imposed respect, and the old man-servant, who had been anxiously watching her, came forward with a deferential bow. Accepting the proffered support of his arm, she moved away with the majesty of a fallen queen.

"Poor thing!" Georgie repeated, as we too moved away. "Yes, I know it is her own fault, but I can't help pitying her. Now I have played myself I understand how fierce the temptation must be—how one is drawn on in spite of one's self."

"She has dropped her pocket-book," I remarked, as we passed the place where she had been sitting.

"Is it empty?" my wife inquired. "I thought so—perhaps that note was all she had left in the world! I wish—— Oh, Frederick," she broke off, with a sudden change of tone, clasping her hands on my arm, "I have such a lovely idea! Put my winnings in it and give it back to her."

"My dear child, she would be mortally offended," I objected. "She looks as proud as Lucifer."

"But she won't find it out till she gets home, and she will never see us again. Quick, before she is out of sight!"

I shrugged my shoulders, but without further protest placed a roll of notes in the inner pocket of the book, and, leaving Georgie in

charge of my friend, hastened in pursuit of the Princess and her companion. They had left the gambling-rooms, and were passing through the outer hall.

"I beg your pardon, Madame," I said in French, "I think this is yours. You dropped it at the roulette table just now."

She looked at me vaguely a moment, as if the sense of my words had not reached her, then took it from my hand with a faint smile.

"Yes, it is mine. I thank you, sir," she answered, and bowing to me with high-bred courtesy, passed on.

A few moments later we too left the Casino by another entrance.

As we emerged from the heated rooms into the sweet, cool night air, Georgie drew a deep breath of relief.

"I am cured of gambling," she said, seriously. "The Princess Zaterinski's face is worth a hundred sermons. Frederick, let us go home."

II.

THREE years passed before I saw Monte Carlo again—disastrous years for me!

The firm of which my father was the head had failed little more than a year after my marriage, in a financial crisis which brought many another house to ruin. My poor father did not long survive the blow, and I had to begin life afresh, hampered by a delicate wife and a young child.

For myself I was not afraid of poverty or hard work; I had courage, energy, and capacity enough to make my own way. It was for my wife I feared, my darling Georgie, who was so little fitted to endure the least hardship or privation. She had not been strong since the birth of our child, and the doctors pronounced it imperatively necessary for her to spend the winter in the south.

I had managed to bring her to Nice, but our slender "reserve fund" would soon be exhausted, and I should be compelled to take her back just at the bleakest period of the treacherous English spring.

My heart sank when I thought what might be the consequences.

She was always bright, hopeful, and unselfish, and if she had any fears about herself, never let me suspect them.

It was at her desire that I was at Monte Carlo this evening; it would "cheer me up" she said, though in fact it had quite an opposite effect. The happy memories the place brought back to me gave a keener edge to my present trouble.

However, I entered, and after wandering aimlessly for a time about the garish rooms, I found myself at the very table where Georgie and I had stood to watch the players.

Everything seemed exactly as it had been that night. The same

motley crowd drifting to and fro, the same faces gathered round the tables; the same croupiers, with their monotonous cuckoo-cry. "*Faites vos jeux—le jeu est fait; rien ne va plus!*"

Almost unconsciously I took out my purse, and was about to place a twenty-franc piece on "Blanc," when a woman's voice behind me said quietly, in French: "Put it on the red."

I turned quickly, and found myself confronted by a face that seemed familiar to me, though I could not at first recall where I had seen it before; a face with thin, aquiline features, and deep-set dark eyes.

"On the red," she repeated, pointing to the table.

I recognised her then by that wasted hand with the gold seal-ring on the forefinger—it was the Princess Zaterinski.

Startlingly pale, and thinner if possible than ever, but otherwise unchanged.

Mechanically I complied—and won. I was about to take up my winnings when she interposed, in the same distinct, imperious undertone, audible to me alone: "Leave them."

Again I obeyed, and again won.

The next time it was a number she indicated, and once more her forecast proved correct.

I played on automatically, in obedience to her whispered dictates, and always with success.

My strange run of luck began to attract attention, and other players timidly followed my lead.

I "plunged" recklessly; doubled and trebled my stakes; still my good fortune held.

My heart beat fast and my hands trembled as, time after time, I gathered in a handful of notes and gold to add to the growing heap at my side.

The croupiers began to look queerly at each other, and a whisper ran round the table that if this phenomenal luck continued long enough, I should break the bank.

My excitement rose to fever heat. I played on as one in a dream, seeing nothing but the table before me, hearing nothing but the low distinct voice of my monitress, whose prompting never once misled me. I forgot my troubles, I thought neither of the past nor the future; all was effaced in the delirium of the moment.

How long I played I know not, for I had lost all count of time, but at last the monitory voice said quietly: "You have won enough. Go now, and never enter this place again."

Her words broke the spell.

"Madame——" I began quickly, turning to accost her, but she was already moving away.

She looked at me over her shoulder with a grave smile—a smile which haunted me long afterwards.

"I have paid my debt," she murmured. "Adieu!"

The next moment she had disappeared in the crowd.

I drew a deep breath, and looked incredulously at the money so strangely won, half fearing it was but fairy-gold, which would turn to dead leaves in my grasp. But no, it was solid and tangible; and as I realized what it represented—a fresh start in life for me, care and comfort for my wife, a provision for my child, my heart swelled with gratitude towards my strange benefactress, and I felt that I could not let her go unthanked.

I thrust my winnings into my pockets and hastily buttoned my coat over them, looking eagerly round in search of her.

"That old lady who was standing behind me just now—did you notice in which direction she turned?" I asked my neighbour as I rose.

The Frenchman looked at me in surprise.

"I saw no lady near you, Monsieur," he replied.

"Yes, yes—a tall old lady in black; the Princess Zaterinski. You must have seen her," I persisted; "she was close to us a moment ago!"

One of the croupiers, near whom I stood, paused with his rake suspended, and looked up at me.

"*Whom* did you say, Monsieur?" he demanded, in a tone of emphatic astonishment.

"The Princess Zaterinski."

He shook his head.

"You are mistaken. It could not have been the Princess you saw!"

"But I assure you that it was! I know her by sight—I have seen her before!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It is quite impossible."

"Why impossible?" I demanded.

He paused to arrange the five-franc pieces in a neat little pile before him.

"Because, Monsieur, the Princess Zaterinski is dead," he answered deliberately. "She died at Nice a year ago, and is buried in the Russian cemetery there . . . Messieurs, *faites vos jeux!*"

LINES ON A NUN

Immured in Purton Church, Wilts, whose skeleton was discovered in 1872.

TAKE thy candle, hold the cross,
Thou must die for mortal sin;
Better bear the body's loss
Than the loss of soul within.

Lady Abbess, lead the way;
Sister, check thy rising tear;
Do not pity—rather pray—
She is lost to all but fear.

Press her body to the wall,
Leave unclosed a narrow space,
That she hear our mercy call
From the priest in holy place

Scanty food may pass her lips,
Lengthen thus her parting wail: *
This may plead in life's eclipse
When no other plea avail.

Seal the tomb: the mass is said,
Ere the well-spread mortar dry;
We declare our daughter dead,
Though you hear a muffled cry.

* * * * *

Four hundred years,—her bones are white,
Mute witness of barbaric creed,
Where darkness brooded till the light
Of love divine all fetters freed.

C. J. LANGSTON.

* Chicken-bones and remnants of food, evidently passed in to her after having been walled up, were discovered.

WITHOUT FURTHER PREFACE, ETHEL BEGAN TO READ.

THE ARGOSY.

FEBRUARY, 1894.

THE GREY MONK.

By the Author of "The Mysteries of Heron Dyke"

CHAPTER V.

AT ONE FELL BLOW.

WE are under other skies and the time is again two years later.

"Alec Clare, by all that's wonderful!"

The exclamation came from one of two men who, happening to be bent on getting into a street car at the same moment, found themselves unexpectedly face to face. It was followed next moment by a hearty hand-grip, and then the long-parted acquaintances—friends, in the best sense of the word, they could hardly have been termed—sat down side by side.

It was at Pineapple City, a thriving and intensely go-ahead township on the borders of Lake Michigan, that the meeting just recorded took place.

Denis Boyd and Alec Clare had been intimate at college, without being exactly chums. Their fathers had been friends of long standing, and it seemed only natural to the two young men that they should copy their sires' example. Boyd had read far more assiduously than the heir of Withington Chase had ever cared to do: his father was far from being a rich man and he was anxious about his degree. Their college career had come to an end at the same time, they had gone down together and had parted with mutual good wishes and an implied promise to meet again in town later on, since which time till now they had not set eyes on each other.

"And now tell me what fortune, good or bad, has landed you in this out-of-the-way spot," began Boyd. "Of course I assume that, like myself, you are merely a bird of passage."

"On the contrary, this place is my home. I am engaged in business here."

Denis Boyd gave vent to a low whistle.

"Strange how things turn out, is it not?" continued Alec. "But before I add to your surprise, suppose you make your own confession, and tell me how it comes to pass that you happen to be here."

Boyd laughed. "My confession—to accept your own term—will be of the briefest and baldest. You may, or may not, remember that I was destined for the Law, but shortly after you and I parted my father came to grief over a bank failure, and I was compelled to look out for some immediate means of earning a living. A situation in a commercial house in Liverpool offered itself, which I gladly accepted, and there I have been ever since, working my way up by slow but sure degrees. I am over in the States on a matter of business for my firm, which admits of my combining a little holiday-making with it. I reached here late last evening, got through my business a couple of hours ago, and am killing time while waiting to be picked up by a train going East in exactly half an hour and five minutes from now. But here we are at the depot. Won't you alight and keep me company for my remaining thirty-five minutes? My portmanteau is in the cloak-room, or whatever they call the place in this part of the world."

Accordingly they alighted and proceeded to stroll up and down the station platform.

While the other had been talking, Alec had had time to pull himself together and to decide how far he should, or should not, take Boyd into his confidence. For various reasons he would much have preferred not meeting him, but that was beyond help now; and, after all, Boyd was a gentleman and the least hint would suffice to seal his lips.

"I suppose," began Alec, with a little laugh, "that I am not the first fellow by many who has contrived to find himself at odds with his father, or whose father thought he had just cause to find fault with the error of his ways; at any rate, the pater and I came to the conclusion that we should be better apart for at least a few years to come. For a time I wandered about the Continent, leading a free-and-easy Bohemian sort of life. At length I grew tired of doing nothing, and having had a certain amount of capital placed at my command, which I was desirous of tripling, or quadrupling, as the case might be, I determined to try my fortune in the States. That was two years ago. The result, considering my utter lack of business knowledge, was only what might have been expected. I gained a certain amount of experience, it is true, but it was at the expense of half my capital. I was disheartened, but by no means despairing. Leaving the scene of my ill fortune, I came West. I had no particular object in halting even for an hour at Pineapple City, beyond being tired with a long railway journey and intolerably bored by a fellow traveller who persisted in clinging to me like a leech, and whom I was determined to get rid of at any cost. Well, I had not been here many hours

before I made the acquaintance of an Englishman of the name of Travis, a gentleman by birth and education, who, like yourself, had lighted on evil days, and had been lured all this way from home in the hope of being able to make a living, and ultimately, perhaps, a competence. The profession he had set up in was that of a breeder and trainer of horses for riding and carriage purposes. It was a business which he believed to be capable of considerable extension, and, just then, he was looking out for a partner who was prepared to invest a certain number of dollars in the concern. The opportunity seemed to me one which I should have been foolish to let pass me, more especially as I happen to know something about horseflesh ; and, not to bore you with details, I will merely add that, after due investigation, I became Frank Travis's partner. That happened two months ago."

"From what you have just told me," said Boyd, "I conclude that you have no present intention of returning to England."

"None whatever," answered Alec drily.

"And have you never regretted your self-imposed expatriation?"

Alec shook his head. "So far I have had no cause whatever for doing so."

At this juncture they were all but run down by a man who was coming full tilt out of the refreshment buffet. "Ah, Mr. Alexander, glad to see you," he exclaimed. "Have only time to say that the pair of chestnuts you and your partner sold me a fortnight ago have turned out perfect rippers—yes, sir, rippers. My wife—ah-ha!—hasn't once been out of temper with me since I bought 'em. By-bye." And with that he was gone.

Denis Boyd looked at Alec, and the latter read a certain question in his eyes.

"When I came out to the States I chose to drop my surname. I am known to everybody here simply as John Alexander," he said quietly. "And look here, Boyd," he added, "I shall be glad if, when you get back home, you will make no mention of having met me. I have certain reasons for asking this of you."

"My dear fellow, not a word more is needed," replied the other heartily. "You may rely upon my silence."

A minute or two before, Boyd had been on the point of asking Alec whether he was still a bachelor, but it now seemed to him that such a question might savour, if not exactly of impertinence, yet of a desire to pry into a matter which was really no concern of his. It was evident there were incidents in his friend's career which he did not wish to have touched on. He would leave his question unasked.

A few minutes later Boyd's train steamed into the station.

After having parted from his friend, Alec was tempted by the fineness of the evening to go for a solitary ramble into the outskirts of the town, which, in one direction, could almost claim to be termed picturesque. His encounter with Boyd had served to awaken in him

thoughts and memories which had long been dormant, but which now for a little while claimed him as their own with a persistency that would not be denied. It was not so much the scenes of his college life that his meeting with Boyd had recalled to visionary existence, but still earlier scenes connected with his life at the Chase. Once more he was a boy by his mother's side, and felt her caressing hand smooth down his ruffled curls; once more he was pacing the dusky coverts with Martin Rigg, flushing now a covey of young partridges, and now some crusty old pheasant that evidently resented being disturbed; or else he was galloping through the park at a break-neck pace on his shaggy Shetland pony. And then, like some grim spectre, the image of his father came gliding in, and all the happy pictures vanished, as when the dark slide of a magic lantern is suddenly shut down.

He came back to the present and its more immediate interests with a sigh.

There were several circumstances in his life since they had last met, of which he had hinted nothing to Boyd, and he was grateful to his friend for having forborne to question him more closely, as many men in like circumstances would not have failed to do.

For instance, he, Alec, had breathed no syllable having reference to his marriage. That, indeed, was with him a subject about which he could bear to speak to no one, for long before this he had discovered, to his bitter cost, that his marriage was a failure, and that in asking Giovanna Rispani to become his wife he had committed one of the greatest mistakes which it is possible for a man to make. He and his wife had scarcely an interest in common. Giovanna had never really cared for him, but had married him for the sake of his money. To her limited experience, six thousand pounds had represented unbounded riches; for her it meant travel, and fine clothes, and sojourning at big hotels in such cities as Milan, or Paris, or London.

Bitter, very bitter was her disappointment when, after their arrival in America, her husband took up his abode in a third-rate town in one of the Eastern States, where he conceived that there was an opening for the profitable investment of a portion of his capital. At that time his dream was to make a fortune, whereas he had only succeeded in losing his money, and in helping to build up the fortunes of others. All Giovanna's foolish dreams had vanished like a wreath of mist at sunrise, and intensely did she resent the fact. There was nothing of the scold about her, nor had she any of those pettish, irritating ways, by means of which so many women make their discontent with their surroundings felt. She was a cold, proud, silent, disappointed woman, who withdrew into herself, and who manifested not the slightest interest in her husband, or any of his concerns. She hated the country to which he had brought her; the climate was atrocious; the people among whom she dwelt, and all their ways, were antipathetic to her; she grew homesick and pined

for her own country and her own people. One child had been born of the marriage.

When Alec went West in further search of that fortune which seemed so chary of smiling on him, he left his wife and child behind. At that time he had still a little over two thousand pounds remaining of the six thousand he had received from Mr. Page. This balance had lately been reduced by the sum of fifteen hundred pounds, that being the price he had paid for the privilege of entering into partnership with Mr. Frank Travis.

Good fellow as the latter was, and much as he esteemed him, not even to him had Alec confided the fact that he was a married man. It was not that he had the slightest wish to make a secret of it, but simply from an innate disinclination to speak of his private affairs to any one. Once each week he wrote to Giovanna. In view of the relations now existing between them, he was not weak enough to encumber his letters with any superfluous terms of endearment, which would merely have caused her lip to curl with quiet scorn; his epistles were rather such as a sober business-like brother might have penned to an equally sober and business-like sister. He had kept her informed as to the progress of his negotiations with Travis, and when the matter between them was concluded he did not fail to tell her at what cost the partnership had been secured by him.

All this time he had been living at a boarding-house, but now that his business matters were finally arranged there was no reason why he should not at once look out for a permanent home to which he could remove his wife and child.

In the last letter he had written to Giovanna he had told her that he hoped another month at most would see them together again, by which time the house he had in his mind's eye, a newly built one, would be finished and ready for occupation. In his stroll this evening his footsteps naturally gravitated in the direction of the house in question. His choice of it had in part been determined by reason of its somewhat romantic situation. It was built on a considerable elevation, and from it the eye ranged over a wide extent of wooded undulating country, rising here and there into rocky eminences which owed everything to Nature and nothing to art. A flash of silver on the horizon revealed that the waters of Lake Michigan were no great distance away.

To the eyes of Alec there was something in this landscape that was almost Italian in character, and he flattered himself with the fancy that perchance it would please Giovanna and that she might find in it a charm that would serve in some measure to lessen her regrets for the country he had brought her from.

After he had reached the house and had ascertained what progress the workmen had made since his last visit, and had settled in his mind after what fashion he would like the garden and shrubbery laid out, he sauntered back towards the town. At the boarding-house he found his partner awaiting him. A business telegram had arrived in

the course of the afternoon which necessitated that one or the other of them should set out next morning for Milwaukee, on the opposite shore of the lake. After talking matters over, it was decided that Alec should be the one to undertake the journey. It was now Tuesday, and the probability was that he would be back by Saturday evening at the latest.

Next forenoon Travis drove his partner as far as the steamboat wharf at Davisville and there shook hands with him and bade him good-bye. They had no prevision of what the next few days would bring forth.

As it fell out, Alec's business detained him longer than he had thought it would, necessitating, among other things, an up-country journey of two score miles to a place where no railway had yet penetrated. It was not till a late hour on Monday afternoon that he got back to the hotel at Milwaukee, where he had secured a room on his arrival there the previous Wednesday.

"A letter for you, Mr. Alexander," said the hotel clerk to him as he was passing through the hall. "Been here since Saturday."

As Alec took the letter he saw that the address was in his partner's writing. Anticipating nothing of greater moment than an ordinary business communication, he lingered to glance over the latest batch of telegrams, and proceeded leisurely to his own room before opening the envelope. But all his *sang-froid* vanished the moment his eye lighted on the contents, and in its stead a deadly fear gripped him by the heart. There were two enclosures, one a brief hurried scrawl from Travis, the other a black-edged missive from his wife. Of what fatal news was this last the messenger? Could it be that his child was dead? or—or was it merely that Vanna had had news from home of the death of some one there? It was the former dire possibility that had smitten him with an unspeakable dread.

He steadied himself sufficiently to read what his partner had to tell him before breaking the black-edged envelope.

"Dear Alexander" (wrote Travis), "the enclosed was brought here by a boarding-house messenger a few minutes ago. As it may be of importance that it should reach you with the least possible delay, and as you have wired me not to expect you back before Tuesday, I mail it on at once.

"Sincerely yours,

"Frank Travis."

Then he tore open his wife's letter.

A single devouring glance at the first half dozen lines was enough. His child was dead!

He could read no further then. The lines danced and quivered before his eyes. The letter fluttered from his fingers. For a moment or two every drop of blood seemed drawn from his heart. He caught at a chair and sank into it. He was as one smitten by

a blow from an invisible hand. The love his wife had repudiated and would have none of, had been lavished by him, secretly and undemonstratively, on his child. His affection for it had been of that deep intense kind which neither seeks nor finds for itself an adequate outlet in words. And now he was bereft of the one object that had made life still sweet to him, and henceforward naught was left him save the dust and ashes of existence!

Afternoon had darkened into evening, and night had come before he roused himself sufficiently to pick up his wife's letter and read it through to the end. By that time a lighted lamp had been brought him.

He now noticed for the first time that the letter bore a date a week old, but just then he could no more than vaguely wonder why and how it had been delayed. Giovanna had always been in the habit of beginning her epistles to her husband without troubling herself to employ any of those preliminary terms of affection or politeness which most writers make use of, and her present one was no exception to the rule.

"It has become my most painful task" (she began) "to have to inform you that our child died in the course of Friday night last, after only a few hours' illness. Everything was done for it that could be done, but in vain. The doctor whom I had summoned was present when the end came. The funeral took place to-day, Monday. I enclose you the certificate of burial.

"It seemed to me that it would have been useless, as well as foolish, to bring you upwards of seven hundred miles merely in order that you might be present at the interment. All was over. Your presence could have availed nothing.

"With the death of my babe the strongest link in the chain which bound me to you, is broken. Had it lived I should not have taken the step I have now determined upon: which is, to at once go back to my own home, in my own country—which I ought never to have left.

"Both you and I have long been aware of the terrible mistake we made in taking upon ourselves the obligations of matrimony. It is not too late, however (or so I think and believe), to undo in some measure at least the folly of which we were mutually guilty. There is one way, and one only, by means of which this can be effected. It is for us to separate—it is for you to go your way, and I to go mine—and to be virtually dead to each other henceforward and for ever.

"I shall leave this place three hours hence on my way to New York, whence I shall take the steamer for Europe, but whether I shall proceed direct to Italy, or whether I shall first visit my mother's relatives in England, I have not yet decided. In any case, it would be useless for you to follow me. My mind is fully made up, and nothing would induce me to return to you.

"When you left this place three months ago you put into my hands

a number of blank signed cheques which I was to fill up at my own discretion for whatever sums I might find myself in need of while you were away. By means of one of the cheques in question I have drawn out the remaining balance standing to your credit in the bank, amounting to a trifle over five hundred pounds. You are not the man to begrudge me this sum, I am sure, for you were ever generosity itself towards me.

"And now I have nothing more to add, except to bid you farewell, and to ask you to believe that you have, in all sincerity, the best wishes for your future happiness and prosperity of one who regrets that she cannot love you as such a man as you deserves to be loved.

"GIOVANNA.

"P.S. I have arranged for this letter not to be posted till a week after my departure, so that by the time you read these lines I shall be half-way on my road to Europe."

Alas, poor Alec! Wife and child lost to him at one fell blow! As regarded the latter, he could but bow his head in all humility, as it behoves all of us to do when our turn comes to be smitten, and breathe the words: "Thy will be done." But Vanna? Oh, the callousness, the cruelty that breathed through almost every line of her letter! He had wept for the loss of his child, and it had been an infinite relief to him to do so—but his eyes were dry now; he had no tears left for her. It seemed rather as if her desertion of him served, during those first bitter hours, to kindle in his heart a dull smouldering fire of resentment, which was none the less intense in that it betrayed nothing of itself on the surface. Go after her, indeed!—try, with endearments and protestations, to induce her to return! Not a single step would he stir in pursuit. He and she had done with each other for ever.

The miserable hours trod slowly in the footsteps of each other, and the night wore itself away somehow. He never undressed, or went to bed, but about daybreak he flung himself on a couch, where he sank into a half slumber which lasted till the people of the house were astir and the world had woke up to another day.

He was glad when ten o'clock had come, at which hour he set foot on board *The Prairie Belle* on his way back to Pineapple City.

CHAPTER VI.

ALEC'S FATE.

DENIS BOYD did not forget the promise he had given Alec Clare not to mention his encounter with the latter after his return to England. It did not, however, seem to him that there was any necessity to include his father in the embargo thus laid on his

tongue. Accordingly when, a little later, Colonel Boyd went on a visit to his son, the latter, knowing that his father and Sir Gilbert were acquaintances of many years' standing, mentioned, as one of the minor incidents of his recent visit to the States, his meeting with young Clare, without any thought that the Colonel might have occasion to deem it worth his while to mention the circumstance again. As it fell out, however, a few weeks later, Colonel Boyd and Sir Gilbert found themselves together in the reading-room of the London club of which both were members. They had not met for some time, for of late years the baronet's visits to the metropolis had become few and far between. They greeted each other heartily, and agreed to lunch together.

In the course of the meal the Colonel said: "By the way, Clare, my lad and yours stumbled across each other quite by accident a little while ago in the States, where Denny had been sent on a matter of business for his firm."

"Ah, indeed," remarked the baronet as he set down the glass of wine he had been in the act of raising to his lips. "And how was Alec?"

"First-rate, for anything I was told to the contrary. They had only a very short time together, as I understood, and seeing that they were chums at college, they would have plenty of subjects to talk about."

"No doubt—no doubt. By-the-bye, did your boy say whereabouts in the States it was—in New York, or Boston, or Chicago—that he came across Alec?"

"Oh, it was in some quite outlandish place I believe; but I did not trouble to remember the name."

"I am rather anxious to ascertain Alec's address, and for this reason: his godmother, Mrs. Fleming, died lately and left him a legacy of two thousand pounds. The executors, being anxious to wind up the estate, have applied to me for his address, which I am unable to furnish them with. You see, Alec kicked over the traces pretty considerably some time ago, and he and I parted in a huff, since which he has not condescended to keep me *au courant* of his movements. Now, if your boy can supply me with his address, it will get me out of my difficulty with Mrs. Fleming's executors."

"I have no doubt Denny can furnish you with what you want. I will write to him by to-night's post, and advise you of the result the moment I hear from him."

Denis Boyd, in view of his promise to Alec Clare, could not help feeling annoyed at the turn the affair had taken; and yet, as he put it to himself, what harm could come of his furnishing Sir Gilbert with the information he asked for? Apparently the only purpose for which the baronet required his son's address was that he might thereby be enabled to inform him that a certain legacy was awaiting his instructions. Really, when he, Boyd, came to think of it, Alec

ought to be very grateful to him, and doubtless would be were he made aware of the circumstances, for having had it in his power to do him such a capital turn.

His brief note to his father was to the effect that young Clare, who passed in the States under the name of "John Alexander," was at the time the writer met him, residing at Pineapple City, a town on the borders of Lake Michigan, in the State of the same name; and, further, that he was engaged in business there, his partner being an Englishman of the name of Travis.

This note was at once forwarded by Colonel Boyd to Sir Gilbert, who lost no time in taking it in person to Mr. Page.

As it happened, the lawyer about that time had occasion to send a confidential member of his staff to America, to make certain inquiries in the interests of one of his clients; so it was decided that, instead of trusting to the chances of a letter reaching Alec through the medium of the post, the clerk in question, Winch by name, should proceed as far as Pineapple City, seek out "Mr. John Alexander," and deliver into his hands the communication which would be entrusted to him for that purpose.

The letter referred to was written by Mr. Page, and was read and approved of by Sir Gilbert before being sealed up. It was nothing more than a briefly worded intimation to the effect that two thousand pounds, being the amount of the late Mrs. Fleming's legacy to her godson, was awaiting his disposal in the hands of the executors at such and such an address. But the baronet had no knowledge of the little private note from the same pen which the lawyer contrived to smuggle into the envelope. In it he reproached Alec for having allowed so long a time to pass without communicating with him, begging him at once to repair the omission, and assuring him that in the writer he had a friend who might always be relied upon to keep a watchful eye over his interests.

Mr. Winch started on his long journey in due course. He would attend, first of all, to that other business which was taking him across the Atlantic, and then make the best of his way to Pineapple City.

Mr. Winch was an undersized, podgy man, with a round full-moon sort of face and cold fish-like eyes of no hue in particular, to which a pair of spectacles lent a still more vacuous expression. He was clean shaven, always dressed in well-worn black, and, wet or fine, was never seen without a serviceable alpaca umbrella. He had been Mr. Page's confidential clerk for many years, and that gentleman esteemed him highly. Behind that Dutch-clock-like mask of a face was a complex-working brain which delighted in secrets and mysteries, and occasionally went so far as to imagine them where none existed. Although his employer had never told him so—for that was one of the few matters which the lawyer kept to himself—Mr. Winch had not the least doubt in his mind that the John Alexander to whom the letter of which he was the bearer was addressed and the heir of

Withington Chase, who had set out on his travels upwards of four years ago and had never returned, were one and the same person. The name alone had been enough to furnish him with the first hint. He seemed to scent a most delightful mystery. Mr. Winch was jubilant, although, to look at him, nobody would have guessed it.

What, then, must have been his feelings—indeed, it is not too much to say that a tear blurred his spectacles—as on the morning of the twenty-first day after his departure from Liverpool he stood in the telegraph office at Pineapple City and wrote out the following cablegram, addressed to Mr. Page :

"J. A. killed. Steamboat explosion—September 18th. Am returning at once."

The mystery on which he had counted had all at once collapsed owing to the death of the person chiefly concerned.

It became Mr. Page's unenviable duty, on receipt of the above message, to convey the news to Sir Gilbert. Over what passed between the two on that occasion we need not linger.

On arriving at Liverpool, Mr. Winch telegraphed to his employer by which train he might be expected to reach Mapleford. It was as a consequence of this message that he found Sir Gilbert Clare seated in Mr. Page's private office when, after a preliminary tap at the door, he was bidden to enter.

"Glad to see you back, Winch, and looking so well," said Mr. Page heartily, as he shook hands with his subordinate. "Of course I know already from your advices the nature of the arrangements you were enabled to make in that matter of Lord Dovercourt, and I congratulate you on your success. Later on we will go through the details one by one. But, sit down. What I want you to do first of all is to furnish me with the whole of the particulars you have been able to obtain confirmatory of the cablegram by which you advised me of the death of Mr. John Alexander."

Mr. Winch seated himself opposite his employer at the big square writing-table in the centre of the room. Sir Gilbert sat with his back to them and facing the fire. Although he appeared to be immersed in *The Times*, and betrayed no more interest in what followed than any stranger might have done, the reason that had brought him there was perfectly transparent to Mr. Winch, who could not help saying to himself: "Surely to goodness, Mr. Page does not think me such an innocent as not to be able to see through Sir Gilbert's little plot!"

Much of what Mr. Winch had to relate will have already been anticipated by the reader. We need only take up his narrative at the point where Alec Clare, on the morning following the receipt of his wife's letter, stepped on board the *Prairie Belle* at Milwaukee, in the expectation of landing at Davisville about nine o'clock the same evening. But the *Prairie Belle* never reached Davisville. When

about a dozen miles from that place, and soon after nightfall, one of her boilers exploded. The vessel parted amidships, and five minutes later all that was left of her sank in deep water. The accident happened only about half a mile from the shore, and a number of boats at once put out to the rescue of the survivors, of whom a considerable number were picked up, several of them, however, being so badly injured that they afterwards succumbed. Of those saved John Alexander was *not* one. The only inference which could be drawn, was that, either, like many among both passengers and crew, he had been killed outright by the explosion, and that his body had gone down with the ship, or else that, even though, perhaps unhurt, he had sunk before help could reach him from the shore. In any case, alive or dead, nothing was seen or heard of him after the explosion, which had happened just eight weeks prior to Mr. Winch's interview with Mr. Frank Travis.

"I presume," said Mr. Page, "it is a matter of absolute certainty that Mr. Alexander was really on board the ill-fated vessel at the time of the accident."

"That was a question I did not fail to put to Mr. Travis. In reply he told me that among the survivors was a person well acquainted with Mr. Alexander, who had been talking to him only a few minutes before the explosion."

"In that case, I am afraid there is no room left for doubt as to the poor fellow's fate. A sad end, truly, for any one to come to!—I think that will do for the present, Mr. Winch. We will go into other matters later on."

"By-the-way, sir, there is one point which I have not yet mentioned. It is this: When Mr. Alexander, some little time prior to his death, entered into partnership with Mr. Travis, he put the sum of fifteen hundred pounds into the business. That amount Mr. Travis desired me to say that he shall be prepared to refund to Mr. Alexander's heir-at-law after due substantiation of claim and reasonable notice having been given him."

"Hum! very honourable on the part of Mr. Travis. It is a matter, however, as to which there is no immediate hurry, and in regard to which I can take no steps without instructions."

As soon as Mr. Winch had closed the door behind him the baronet faced round.

"It is all true, then!" he exclaimed. "There seems no longer any room for hope."

"None whatever, I am afraid, Sir Gilbert."

"He was my son, Page—my first-born! I cannot forget that Whatever his faults—and they were many—may they lie lightly on his head!"

When, on his return home, the baronet broke the news to his wife, that lady, being a fairly good actress, had no difficulty in giving the needful lugubrious twist to her features, but when she strove to elimi-

nate a tear, she was not so successful. "I am so sorry," she said softly, laying a plump hand for a moment on her husband's shoulder. "Sorry for his sake, poor fellow!—and sorry for yours. But you must strive not to give way, dear. You may rely upon it that it has been ordained for the best." To herself she said: "So, after all, the title as well as the estates will come to Randolph! That is only as it should be. I hate the thought of having to go into mourning, but I suppose there's no help for it."

Poor Lady Clare!

No long time elapsed before a marble tablet was placed *in situ* above the family pew in Withington Church—where there were many more tablets to keep it company—which recorded that it was to the memory of John Alexander Clare, "who was accidentally killed abroad" on such and such a date, "in the twenty-eighth year of his age."

"To think," said Mr. Winch as he one day read the inscription through his spectacles, "that there are only three people in England who know how that poor young man really came by his death, and that I am one of them! But what reason had he for dropping his surname and hiding his identity? Ah! those are mysteries which I'm afraid I shall never now have a chance of fathoming."

By Sir Gilbert's desire, no communication was ever entered into with Mr. Frank Travis. The baronet preferred to sacrifice the fifteen hundred pounds which Alec had invested in the business rather than re-open before the eyes of strangers a chapter of family history which, as he trusted, was now closed for ever.

CHAPTER VII.

TOO LATE.

YEARS nearly a score have come and gone since Mr. Winch brought home the news of the untimely demise of the whilom heir of Withington Chase.

Many have been the changes under the old roof-tree during that time. Sir Gilbert Clare, who is now entering on his seventy-fourth year, is both a widower and childless. Not only is the second Lady Clare dead, but her three sons have followed her to the tomb. Two of them have died of consumption when on the verge of manhood, while the youngest has been accidentally drowned.

Yes, a lonely, childless old man is Sir Gilbert, but still carrying himself bravely before the world, as if in defiance of all the blows a cruel fate has aimed at him, and still retaining a large measure of his old irritability of temper and imperiousness of manner. Would it be too much to wonder whether his heart is ever touched with compunction, or regret, when his eyes chance to rest on a certain tablet above

the family pew—that pew now empty of all but himself—which professes to record the death of his first-born? That, however, is one of those things known to himself alone.

The venue of our story now changes to St. Oswyth's, a town in the Midlands of some twelve to fifteen thousand inhabitants.

It was the fourteenth of May, and Ethel Thursby's nineteenth birthday. Nowhere was there a happier girl than she. Breakfast was just over, and she had come out into the garden to gather a posy of such flowers as were already in bloom for the drawing-room table. Earlier there had been congratulations and presents from her aunts. Miss Matilda had given her "such a love" of a gold watch and chain, while Miss Jane's gift had taken the shape of an inlaid writing-desk filled with stationery stamped with Ethel's monogram, so that really, as she told herself, it was quite a pity her correspondents were so few in number, and that she could not well write to any of them oftener than once a week. Nor had Tamsin forgotten her—dear, rugged, true-hearted Tamsin, who had been her aunt's maid, and hers too for that matter, for more years than she could remember. Ethel's present from her had been a silver thimble, having engraven on its rim the appropriate legend, "A stitch in time saves nine."

While busying herself with the gathering and arrangement of her flowers, Ethel's thoughts were engaged on two very diverse subjects. As she rose from the breakfast-table this morning, her Aunt Matilda had said to her:

"My dear, I and my sister would like to see you in the drawing-room at twelve precisely, when we shall have something of importance to communicate to you."

That the girl should wonder to herself what the "something of importance" could be was but natural.

But just then she had neither time nor inclination to wonder overmuch, her thoughts being almost exclusively taken up by an altogether different matter. The communication which *she* hoped to be able to make to her aunts a few hours hence, far outweighed, in her estimation, anything they could possibly have to say to her. For had not Launce promised that to-day, on her birthday, to wit, he would take off the embargo of silence he had imposed upon her, and give her leave to inform her aunts of their engagement? It was a secret which had weighed upon her ever since, in response to his persistent entreaties, she had yielded a reluctant consent to an arrangement so totally opposed to her feelings and modes of thought. No one but herself could tell how happy she should feel when it was a secret no longer.

The Miss Thursbys had come to reside at St. Oswyth's when Ethel was about two years old. She was an orphan, and who, if

not they, should take charge of the parentless girl and bring her up as their own? Even then they were spinsters of mature age, but beyond silvering their hair in some measure, the intervening years had changed them scarcely at all. They belonged to that happy class of persons, with equable tempers, untroubled by dyspepsia and uncorroded by pessimism, whom Time loves to touch with the gentlest of fingers. He does not overlook them entirely, but the furrows he traces on their placid brows are few and far between. And so they go on for years, growing older by gradations so gentle as to be scarcely perceptible; for, say as we will, the old scytheman has his favourites.

The sisters, on coming to St. Oswyth's, had bought Vale View House—a substantial modern-built mansion, standing in its own pleasant grounds, but a world too big for the requirements of their unpretentious establishment. That, however, was nobody's business but their own.

There they had settled down, and there, in "quiet innocency," it was their hope to spend the remaining term of their lives.

They had a joint income, derivable in part from property left them by their father, and in part by their brother, of about eight hundred pounds a year. In addition to their faithful Tamsin, they kept a couple of maid-servants, a cook, a youth in buttons, and a man who combined the duties of gardener with those of groom to Flossie, the pony driven by them in their pretty little basket-carriage. They came of a Quaker stock, but their father had seceded when they were quite young. They still, however, retained much of the traditional simplicity of dress and demeanour of their progenitors and "thee'd" and "thou'd" each other when they were alone, but rarely, or never, when in the company of others.

Be it known, further, that Miss Matilda and Miss Jane were twins, they having been born within half-an-hour of each other.

Owing, however, to some stupid mismanagement on the part of the nurse, they had got "mixed," so to speak, when only a few hours old, and it was not positively known which of them was the elder.

In this embarrassing state of affairs they had long ago—that is to say, from the date of their commencing to keep house together—come to a mutual arrangement by which they agreed to take it in turns, month and month about, to enact the part of elder sister, during which time the other deferred to her in every way, only, in her turn, to occupy the superior position and be deferred to throughout the following month.

It was an arrangement well understood among the circle of their friends and acquaintance, but, in order that there should be no mistake in the matter, each in turn, during the month she filled the *rôle* of elder sister, wore round her neck, by way of distinguishing token, an old-fashioned gold chain from which was suspended an equally old-fashioned locket, which, when open, displayed on one side a miniature of their mother, and on the other a lock of their father's hair.

Thus it came to pass that whenever people visited at Vale View House, or whenever they were called upon by the sisters, they would nudge each other and whisper, "This is Miss Matilda's month," or Miss Jane's, according to which of them was wearing the chain and locket; and to that one they would have been considered by the sisters as lacking in good manners, had they failed to address her as "*Miss* Thursby," or to treat her with an added shade of deference as representing for the time being the head of the family.

By every one who knew them, both rich and poor (and to numbers of poor people they were very well known indeed) the ladies of Vale View were beloved and respected; although it might be that there were not wanting some would-be "superior" persons who smiled to themselves at certain old-fashioned ways and quaint simplicities of speech and manner which they were quite incapable of appreciating. But such people are to be met with everywhere. It was Mrs. Trippington-Fynes, a new-comer at St. Oswyth's, and regarded as quite an acquisition to the somewhat restricted circle of society in the little town, who, after having been introduced to the Misses Thursby and chatted with them awhile, remarked to Mrs. Sandilands, wife of the popular squire of that name:

"Do you know, my dear, I find them quite too deliciously archaic."

It was a phrase that was repeated and taken up, and for many a day afterwards the sisters were spoken of by one person or another as being "quite too deliciously archaic, don't you know."

But we have left Ethel all this time alone in the garden.

Following her with our eyes, while she pursues her dainty occupation, what do we see? A slender supple figure of medium height, every movement of which betrays an easy unstudied grace with which training has evidently had nothing to do. A small head crowned with plaits and coils of glossy dark brown hair; eyes, too, of a brown so dark that unless you are privileged to gaze into them by sunlight, you would be almost ready to wager that they are absolutely black; large and luminous, with here and there a tiny fleck of ruddy light, they respond instantaneously to every fluctuating emotion of the loving, brave, reverent soul which looks out at you through them. The face, with its candid brow, its rather short straight nose and the soft curves of its chin, has the ineffable charm of purity, of equable pulses, of slow-breathing health both of mind and body; the whole expression is one of sweet, grave steadfastness.

To connect Ethel Thursby in one's thoughts with such feminine weaknesses as a fit of hysterics, or an attack of "nerves," would seem as preposterous as to assume that the man in the moon is afflicted after a similar fashion. This morning she is wearing a lavender-coloured frock of some soft clinging stuff which displays to perfection the charming contours of her figure. Her collarette and cuffs are of lace, woven by a crippled girl in a neighbouring village, whom Ethel counts as one among the number of her humble friends.

The sound of footsteps on the gravel of the carriage drive breaks up her reverie. She turns to behold Everard Lisle, and, as she does so, a smile of welcome illumines her face.

The young man in question was the son of the vicar of the parish church of St. Oswyth's, and had been intended for the medical profession, for which he had displayed much natural aptitude; but an illness, the result of overwork while a student in Paris, had left him with weakened eyesight.

Having been ordered to give up his studies for a long time to come, and to confine himself to some out-door occupation, he had chosen to become the pupil and, later on, the assistant to an architect and land surveyor in St. Oswyth's; and so much did his new profession prove to his liking, and so well did it agree with his health, that at length he definitively decided to discard the one for which he had originally been intended.

Everard's father, the Rev. Harold Lisle, and Sir Gilbert Clare—at that time simply Mr. Clare—had been contemporaries at college, but strangers to each other previously to a certain afternoon, when it had been the good fortune of the former to save the life of the latter, who had been seized with cramp while bathing.

From that time they had never quite lost touch of each other, so that when Sir Gilbert, who always felt that he owed a debt of gratitude to his preserver, became in want of some one to fill the double post of amanuensis to himself—his eyesight having failed him considerably of late—and assistant to his land-steward, Mr. Kinaby, whose health was breaking up, he wrote to the Rev. Harold, offering the position in question to his son, of whose affairs he had some knowledge, by whom it was gladly accepted. Everard Lisle, who had now been a couple of months at Withington Chase, had come over to St. Oswyth's to-day for a special purpose, the nature of which will presently appear.

He had known Ethel Thursby for years, and had loved her as long as he had known her.

They had met frequently, sometimes at his own home, for now and then the ladies from Vale View took tea with his mother, and sometimes in general society. When he had first known her she had been still a schoolgirl, and he had told himself that he could afford to wait till she should be of an age to listen to what he had to say to her.

Then had come the break in his prospects consequent on his illness, after which he had had to begin the world afresh. Knowing that he would have to rely solely upon his own exertions—for his father's living was far from being a lucrative one and there were several fledgelings still under the parental roof—and that some years must necessarily elapse before he would be able to marry, with rare self-abnegation he determined neither by word nor sign to betray his love to the object of it till he should have some assured

prospect of being able to ask her to share with him such a home as she was entitled to expect. To that prospect he had at length attained, and he was here to-day with the determination to tell her all that he had carefully hidden in his heart for so long a time. But delays are dangerous in love, as in so many other of the affairs of life, as Everard was presently destined to find to his cost. He was a well set-up resolute-looking young fellow, clear-eyed and clear-skinned, and groomed to perfection ; in brief, as far as appearance was concerned, a typical young Briton of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

He was making directly for the house, but the moment he caught sight of Ethel his face flushed, a sudden sparkle leapt to his eyes, and he at once turned and made across the lawn towards her. In one hand he was carrying a bouquet of choice orchids covered up in tissue paper.

Ethel, seeing him thus unexpectedly, supposed, naturally enough, that he had come to spend a brief holiday at home, not troubling herself to remember that only a couple of months had gone by since he had taken up the duties of his new position.

"This *is* a surprise," she said smilingly as she gave him her hand. "I quite thought you were a hundred miles away at the least. That's about the distance, is it not, to—to—I forget its name—the place where you are now living?"

They turned together and strolled slowly along.

"That is about the distance," he smilingly replied. "Duty ought, perhaps, to have kept me at Withington Chase, but inclination has brought me to St. Oswyth's. I did not forget that this is your birthday, Miss Ethel ; as a proof of which I venture to offer you these few flowers. Will you deign to accept them with the giver's best wishes for your health and happiness." As he spoke he stripped the paper off the bouquet and offered it for Ethel's acceptance.

She took it without a shadow of hesitation, first coming to a stand and placing on the lawn the basket in which she had been gathering her own flowers. "Oh, how lovely—how exquisitely lovely!" she exclaimed with unfeigned admiration. Flowers such as those were a revelation to her. "It was very very kind of you, Mr. Lisle, to remember my birthday in such a charming fashion. My aunts will be as delighted as I am. Of course you will come in and see them now that you are here."

Even now there was no dawn of suspicion in her heart as to the real purport of his visit. Everard's courage sank a little, but he had come all the way from the Chase to seek his opportunity, and now that he had found it he was not the man to let it slip through his fingers.

"One moment, if you please," he pleaded. "There is something that I wish particularly to say to you."

"Yes?" she said interrogatively, turning her gaze full upon him, with the slightest inflection of surprise in her voice.

Then, all at once, she saw that in his eyes which revealed to her what it was he was about to say to her, and before the clear intense flame of love which glowed in their depths, her own eyes sank abashed and dismayed. To her it came, indeed, as a revelation. For a moment or two all the pulses of her being seemed to stand still. She said to herself, "I am dreaming—presently I shall awake." Everard took her hand and she did not know it. From her unresisting fingers he withdrew the bouquet and placed it on the basket at her feet. It was only when he began to speak that she came to herself. Between the spot where they were standing and the house a large clump of evergreens intervened. From none of the windows could they be overlooked.

Everard, reading in her face some portion of that which was passing through her mind, gave her a few moments in which to recover herself, before saying more. Then, not without misgivings, he resumed:

"It was more, far more, than merely to congratulate you on your birthday and offer you a few flowers that brought me here to-day. It was to tell you that I love you—that I have loved you in secret for years—it was to ask you to be my wife."

A faintly-breathed "Oh!" fluttered from Ethel's lips. She withdrew her fingers from his clasp gently but firmly. Everard's heart sank still lower, but he went bravely on:

"Many a time before to-day," he continued, "have I been tempted to speak to you, to tell you what I am telling you now, but it was a temptation to which I would not yield. I was a poor man with no prospects worth speaking of, and I would not seek to entangle you in an engagement which might have to last for years. But, after long waiting, Fortune's wheel has turned for me, and now——"

He ceased abruptly at the touch of her hand on his sleeve. Her large dark eyes—and at that moment they looked to him larger and darker than they had ever looked before—were gazing into his beseechingly.

"Not a word more—not one, please, Mr. Lisle," she entreated. "Oh, I am so sorry that you have told me this!"

"Is my telling it you, then, of no avail?" he demanded, a little hoarsely.

"Of none whatever," she replied with a slow shake of her head.

His eyes scanned her face searchingly and read there but too surely that his sentence was irrevocable. His chest rose and fell a few times. Not all at once could he command himself.

"So be it," he said at length. "We must all bow to the inevitable. Mine has been the mistake, and mine must be the penalty. I will not urge you by a word more, because I feel how useless it would be to do so. Nor will I longer intrude upon your time. We shall always, I trust, meet as friends in time to come."

"It would grieve me to think otherwise." Then, as she held out her hand: "Always as friends, Mr. Lisle, come what may."

With one hand he lifted his hat and with the other he raised her fingers to his lips.

"I am so sorry," again broke involuntarily from Ethel.

"The sorrow and the regret are for me," answered Everard with a dim smile as, after touching her fingers with his lips, he released them with a sort of gentle reluctance. "For you I trust there are in store many, many returns of to-day, each and all of them crowned with happiness."

Half-a-minute later she was alone.

"Everard Lisle loves me!" she murmured to herself as he disappeared round a bend of the drive. "How strange it seems! And yet, now that he has told me, I can call to mind a dozen little things, any one of which would have revealed his secret to me had I not been so blind. How cruel he must have thought me! how abrupt! And yet what other answer was it possible for me to give him? None whatever."

It may seem strange, nay, perhaps, almost incredible, to that class of young women who are in the habit of regarding three-fourths of the eligible bachelors whom they encounter here and there in society in the light of potential lovers, that Ethel Thursby had never so regarded Everard Lisle. But so it was. She had liked him, she now told herself, far better than she had liked any other of the young men whom she was in the habit of occasionally meeting; but liking is not love, and besides, Launce Keymer had already whispered certain words in her ear.

Perhaps—perhaps, if Everard Lisle had been the first to speak, who could have told what might have happened? Was there some faint premonition in her heart, as this question put itself to her, that he to whom she had given her love might, peradventure, prove less worthy of the gift than Everard would have done?

"No—no!" she told herself almost passionately. "Dear Launce is everything—yes, everything—that any girl could wish for in the man she loves."

Then she began to cry a little, being all the while indignant with herself because her tears would come in her own despite. Then with a start she bethought herself that she had to meet her aunts in the drawing-room at noon, and eleven had struck long ago. She dried her eyes and took up her flowers. More than once, as she walked towards the house, her face was hidden in the bouquet Everard had brought her. What would have been his thoughts had he been there to see?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EBONY CASKET.

At five minutes to twelve the two Miss Thursbys, who prided themselves on their punctuality, entered the drawing-room together, or rather, to speak more correctly Miss Matilda entered first, with Miss Jane close on her footsteps, this happening to be the former's month for enacting the part of elder sister, as a consequence of which she wore what might be termed the "chain of office" with its pendant locket. That something out of the common was on foot could not be doubted, seeing that at that early hour of the day the sisters were already attired in their puce-coloured lutestring gowns, and were wearing their "company caps" and best lace mittens—a conjunction rarely, if ever, witnessed except when some special visitors were expected at Vale View.

Earlier in the day—before breakfast, indeed—they had told each other sadly and for the last time, as if their courage needed stimulating by reiterated assurances, that a certain revelation must no longer be delayed. It had been Matthew's—their dead brother's—wish that Ethel should be told on her nineteenth birthday, and with them his wishes had always been law. And yet it was a grievous thing to have to do. It seemed to them that after to-day "the child," as they still continued to call Ethel between themselves, could never regard them with quite the same eyes as heretofore. Very downcast they looked as they sat there on the ottoman, side by side, waiting for the time-piece to chime the hour of noon.

They were tall fair women, thin without being in the least degree angular; with blue eyes, rather long straight noses, and a slight droop at the corners of the mouth, which, when they were not engaged in conversation, lent them an habitually pensive air, although, in reality, they could be sprightly enough on occasion. When younger they had been noted for their lovely pink-and-white complexions, and their cheeks still retained the delicate ivory clearness of an arum lily. If one had been asked to sum up in the fewest possible words the predominant expression of the twin sisters—so strangely alike and yet not without discernible points of difference—one would have said that it was a mixture in equal parts of sweetness and goodness, and, in so saying, one would not have been far wrong. How it had come to pass that two such women—or neither of them—had never married, was one of those delicate problems which no mere bystander is justified in trying to solve. That they themselves could have told the reason why, had they chosen to do so, is scarcely to be doubted.

On the centre table stood a quaintly carved ebony casket, clamped with silver and having a silver plate let into the lid, on which, in Old English characters, was engraved the monogram, "M. T." Tamsin had brought it in and placed it there a few minutes before the entrance of the sisters.

Scarcely had the timepiece chimed the last stroke of twelve when the door opened and Ethel entered the room. Miss Matilda rose and, crossing to her, embraced her tenderly, an example which was at once followed by Miss Jane. This ceremonious greeting, taken in conjunction with her aunts' "robes of state," and the presence of the ebony casket, which she had never seen opened, but which, as long as she could remember, had been known to her as the depository of Uncle Matthew's papers, all sufficed to convince the girl that some momentous occasion was at hand. Her cheeks paled perceptibly and her limbs began to tremble. Then she drew in her breath, called herself a coward, and asked herself what she had to fear. A moment or two she stood, and then she seated herself in the pretty fancy-chair which she called her own. It had been her Aunt Jane's gift on her sixteenth birthday.

"My dear child," began Miss Matilda—and then she was compelled to pause for a few seconds before she could continue—"My dear child," she repeated, "your Aunt Jane and I have asked you to meet us in order that we may reveal to you certain circumstances connected with your early history of which you have heretofore been kept purposely in ignorance, but which it was the desire of our dear brother should be made known to you on your nineteenth birthday. That day has now arrived, and we are here in order to carry out our brother's wishes."

Miss Matilda paused again, and glanced at her sister, who responded by an encouraging nod, as much as to say, "Very nicely put, indeed."

Miss Matilda resumed:

"My dear Ethel, you have been brought up to call my sister and me by the title of Aunt—and very sweet, as coming from your lips, it has sounded in our ears—and to the world at large you have passed as our niece. But the time has now come when the truth must no longer be withheld from you. My child, you are *not* our niece, nor any relative whatsoever. It grieves me to the heart to have to tell you this."

Here the spinster's voice quavered and broke; she turned away her face. Miss Jane was biting her under-lip in an effort to keep down her emotion; one of her hands stole out and clasped a hand of her sister.

A low, inarticulate cry broke from Ethel. It was the cry of one not merely wounded, but stunned. She half rose from her chair and then sat down again and stared from one to the other, her eyes saying for her that which her lips were powerless to utter. Then all in a moment her tongue was loosened as if a cord had been cut. An instant later she was on her knees in front of the sisters, pressing a hand of each "Then, if you are not my aunts, whose child am I?" she cried aloud.

It was a quarter of an hour later. The sisters had mingled their tears with Ethel's. They had petted and made much of her till some measure of composure had come back to her. She knew that she had

not yet been told all there was to tell; there was more to follow; but no second shock could equal the first. The worst was known to her; it could matter little—or so just then it seemed to her—what still remained to be told.

Presently Miss Matilda resumed her interrupted narrative.

"Many years ago—between nineteen and twenty, in point of fact—my brother Matthew, by the death of a half-cousin who had made his home in the United States, came in for a considerable legacy in the shape of landed property in that country. As a consequence, Matthew deemed it necessary that he should go out there in order to look after his interests, and he kindly offered to take my sister and me with him for a holiday. To this day Jane and I look back to that journey as the one great event of our lives. We remained in the States about three months, during which time we saw much, both of the country and the people. In the hope that the longer sea voyage would prove beneficial to my brother's health, we came back by a sailing vessel named *The Pandora*, instead of by steamer, as on our outward journey. It was in the course of our return voyage that certain events happened in connection with you, my dear child, having an important bearing on your future; an account of which, later on, and when he felt that his time in this world was growing short, my brother embodied in the form of a written statement, which was placed by him in his ebony casket and the same given into the custody of myself and sister a few hours before he breathed his last. It is that statement which I shall now proceed to place in your hands and which it has become your duty to open and read."

As she finished speaking, Miss Matilda rose and having selected one of the keys which hung from her chatelaine, proceeded to unlock and open the casket, which proved to be full of legal-looking documents—deeds, securities and what not. From underneath these she presently drew forth an oblong envelope which she handed to Ethel. It was fastened on one side with a large red seal and on the other was endorsed, "To my adopted Niece. To be opened by her on her nineteenth birthday, or sooner should my sisters deem it advisable.—M. T."

Ethel's hands trembled in spite of her. She looked at Miss Matilda with a pitiful smile. "Will not you open it and read it for me, dear aunt—if"—with a little sigh—"I may still be allowed to call you by that name?"

"My child, it is *your* place, nay, your duty, to open it and read what you will find written therein;" adding, with a touch of that old-fashioned phraseology which became her so well: "And I have never yet found my Ethel unresponsive to the call of duty."

Ethel said no more, but at once broke the seal and drew forth the enclosure, which consisted of a double sheet of letter paper closely covered with writing in a bold, masculine hand. The sisters, sitting bolt upright, one mittened hand laid across the other, looked on in

silence. Having laid aside the envelope and straightened out the enclosure, Ethel said to Miss Matilda: "Do you wish me to read it aloud?"

"My dear, that is entirely a matter for your own judgment. My sister and I are already cognisant of the contents, our brother having permitted us to peruse the paper previously to sealing it up."

"Still, I think I should prefer to read it aloud."

"As you please, my love."

A faint wintry smile lighted up the faces of the sisters. It was perhaps because they were so sad at heart that they smiled. It is a way their sex sometimes have.

Without further preface Ethel began to read:—

"My dear Child,—When these lines meet your eye the hand that penned them will be dust.

"Having reason to feel assured that my remaining span of life will be a brief one, I have deemed it best, in your interests, and with a view to any contingencies which may arise in the future, to draw up a clear and succinct statement of the circumstances which first served to bring you under the notice of my sisters and myself, and led to our taking charge of you, temporarily, as we thought at the time, and ultimately to your adoption by us.

"In the autumn of the year 18— my sisters and I, after a brief sojourn in the United States, took passage on our return voyage from New York to London by the clipper ship *Pandora*. There were not more than a score of passengers in addition to ourselves, but among them was a certain Mrs. Montmorenci-Vane, with her child, a baby about six months old. Her nursemaid, according to her account, having deserted her within an hour or two of her coming on board, she engaged a young woman from among the steerage passengers to look after her child during the voyage. Unfortunately, when the voyage was about half accomplished, Mrs. Montmorenci-Vane fell overboard one dark night and was lost. There was no one on the *Pandora* who knew anything about her; she was a complete stranger to every one. In this state of affairs, my sisters, who had their maid Tamsin with them, took upon themselves the care of the drowned woman's babe for the rest of the voyage, in the expectation that some one would meet the ship on its arrival—some relative or friend—into whose hands they could transfer it.

"In point of fact, when the *Pandora* reached the London Dock it was met by a thin, shabbily-dressed, consumptive-looking man, who had come to inquire for his sister, one Martha Griggs. There was no such person on board, but, by means of a photograph, he recognised his sister in the Mrs. Montmorenci-Vane, who had fallen overboard. Never did I see a man more utterly dumfounded than he. His sister had been unmarried. Only a few months before she had gone out to the States as maid to a wealthy lady, who, a

little later, had died there. She had written to her brother that she was coming home by the *Pandora*, and had asked him to meet the ship. But as to why she had chosen to call herself Mrs. Montmorenci-Vane, why she had gone to the extravagance of paying for a cabin passage, and whence she had obtained the child she passed off on board as her own, he professed himself as being utterly unable to comprehend. That the man's wonder and amazement were genuine it was impossible to doubt.

"He was a poor man, he averred, with a family of his own, and he would have nothing to do with his sister's child, which, according to his account, was not hers at all. For anything he cared, it might go to the workhouse. He went away like a dazed man, with a promise that he would call on me the next morning; but he failed to do so, and I have never set eyes on him from that day to this.

"That the child thus strangely thrown on our hands should be committed to the tender mercies of the workhouse was not to be thought of. For the time being it was put out to nurse, where my sisters were satisfied that it would be well cared for. When, a couple of years later, they went to reside permanently at St. Oswyth's, they took the child with them, they having decided to adopt it; and, in order that the tongue of idle rumour and scandal might have no cause to wag, at my persuasion they consented to the innocent ruse of passing the girl off to the world as their niece.

"I need scarcely add that you, my dear Ethel, are the child in question.

"In these few lines are summed up the whole of the facts bearing upon your early history which are known to my sisters and myself. I may, however, be allowed to record my firm belief that the person who called herself Mrs. Montmorenci-Vane was not your mother. That, after this length of time, the mystery of your birth and parentage will ever be cleared up, seems to me exceedingly doubtful; but even should such prove to be the case, who shall venture to say that the knowledge has not been withheld from you for some wise purpose. That, should you be spared, you will grow up to be a comfort and a blessing to those who have made their home your home, and that you will return them love for love, I feel fully assured.

"MATTHEW THURSBY."

(*To be continued.*)

THE LEGEND OF THE CENTURIES.

"How forgotten will they be all—the great men of the day, when this man will be still great and shining."—FLAUBERT.

WHEN Victor Hugo, at the ripe age of eighty-three, dedicated 'La Légende des Siècles' to his beloved France, he described it as the dead fruit of a fallen tree.

The pathetic simile carried him very far from the truth: the tree was not fallen—it was more vigorous than ever: the leaves were not dead—they were still fresh and green: it may even be doubted if the first-fruits of his genius could show such beauty and variety.

Take *Oceano Nox* and *Tristesse d'Olympio* from 'Les Rayons et les Ombres,' and two or three short pieces from 'Les Voix intérieures,' and both these volumes would be singularly impoverished, whereas it would be hard to find the page in this, his crowning work, that any true lover of poetry would willingly spare.

Returning to pure prose in his preface, Hugo does himself more justice. He explains the meaning of his work—its immense scope and intention—nothing less than the history of humanity in all ages; to paint it successively and simultaneously under all its aspects—history—fable—philosophy—religion—science. He says that in it will be found something of the past, something of the present, and a vague mirage of the future—that he has considered the human race, accomplishing, through the ages, a series of acts on earth under two aspects, the historic and the legendary, the latter being not less real than the former, and the former as conjectural as the latter.

He confesses that he has assigned the prominent place to the legendary aspect, but he has used the torch of truth to light up human tradition—in his own words: "*la fiction parfois—la falsification jamais.*"

The sign which marks the whole of Victor Hugo's work is this audacious touch—there is no subject that he fears to handle, armed as he always is with a keen love of justice and an implacable hatred of evil and evil-doers.

His philosophy has been much called in question as showing no fixity, and emerging only in fragments—more brilliant than solid—but whatever theory he may put forth is supported with so much vigour, so many striking analogies, such vivid and just observation that it never fails to interest; and the principle of Unity on which he insists so often and so strongly is doubtless a near approach to one of those great facts which will one day be better understood and substantiated.

His religion and his science have not always fared much better than

his metaphysics, but it is not disputed that in his perception of what is good and true, and in his manner of holding fast to what he has so found, there is the essence of all real worship and all real belief.

The 'Legend' consists of three parts. The first was sent over to Paris from Guernsey in 1859. The last was published in 1883, two years before his death, the whole having occupied him twenty-four years.

So gigantic a conception, in its magnitude and variety alone, must throw into the shade all less daring achievements; for though the history of mankind in general, under the type of a single human being, has been undertaken by such poets as Æschylus, Goëthe, and Shelley, the subject in their hands was really limited to individual experience and struggle.

With Hugo every glowing episode of a series is perfectly independent, although connected with the rest, and helps to form a complete and consecutive whole—a mosaic where every stone has its own form and colour; and surely so great a triumph of imagination, such riches of thought, such perfection of words, were never found united in more fulness of harmony.

But it is a curious fact that although his fame is well recognised in England, it is rather in connection with his novels and his plays than with his poems. 'Hernani,' 'Ruy Blas,' 'Marion Delorme,' 'Les Miserables,' 'Notre Dame,' and nearly all his other works of fiction have become familiar as household words, whilst his romances in verse are hardly known at all; and if, under that title, were published the stories of Eviradnus—Roland—Aymerillot—and Ruy Diaz the Cid—a great many people would be fain to confess they never even heard of them!

Moreover the mass of English readers would be startled if the sweetness, grace and tenderness of Victor Hugo were cited as his distinguishing qualities, for many of his most exquisite creations are those which strike the ordinary critic as most foreign to his genius.

He is accounted to prefer depicting immense material spaces filled with Titanic forms, painted after history or fable, or fashioned out of a grandiose dream-world of his own. His strength, his grandeur, his scorn—are accepted as his prominent, if not his sole characteristics; but Théophile Gautier, who knew him better, declared of him that he was wholly a lyrical poet.

The first series of the 'Legend' is a somewhat sombre retrospect, and like the prelude to a song half dreamlike—half suggestive—confused at times—as the voices of Nature are confused. He gives the rein to his pictorial fancy: the long reveries of exile—the winds and storms of the sea transport him into distant worlds where facts appear like visions.

This is naturally the case with the Hebrew stories—the mission of woman—the first appearance of evil, when the conscience takes the form of the visible eye of God—and the pastorals.

The first distinct note is sounded in the Romancers of the Cid, and the taking of Narbonne, when Charlemagne returning from his wars in Spain, full of grief for the loss of Roland, and half his chivalry in the valley of Roncevalles is suddenly roused by the sight of battlements and glittering towers.

He sees before him another conquest, his crosses are at an end, and turning to the dukes and barons in his train he proposes to take the city. But they are weary of warfare, and grim and rueful, each in turn with characteristic speech refuses the enterprise.

With happy descriptive strokes, this old delightful record of chivalry shows us the fury of the Emperor with his grand seigneurs, the renewed bitterness of mourning for the Paladins—the giants—who would have attempted the conquest of a world at his command—and then the picture of the young squire who steps from out the ranks

"With confident, serene, intrepid air,"

and offers to take the city.

All the music of morning, says Swinburne—all the sunshine of romance, all the sweetness and charm of chivalry will come back upon all readers, at the gracious and radiant name of Amerillot.

"*La force, toujours la force,*" was the outcry of Hugo's literary detractors when the second series of the 'Legend' appeared. The old man, they said, had lost nothing of his energy; it almost appeared as if this were increased by the loss of former grace and finesse; but what happened to ancient trees had happened to him—the bark had thickened, and the delicate canals through which the sap used to flow so easily, were almost closed: the verses had become, they said, like blocks of stone: the poet had attempted greater things than ever, and had succeeded, but the agility was not the same; the chords were louder, and less musical.

But this was captious criticism.

The faithful chronicler did but record the treacheries and rough revenges of early civilisation, where enmities were bound to end in battles, rejoicings in excesses, revels in orgies.

Hugo's genius leans to the side of mystery; he is a master of all that is colossal, but he is at his highest and best in all that is magnanimous. He loves the glowing colours of mediæval romance, the cycle of heroic deeds, and the tender human interest of peaceful days.

The poet, like the reader, turns with satisfaction from the terrors of conscience and the heights of Olympus to the ideal figure of the Cid, to the fisherman's cottage, and the garden of little Paul.

One of the innumerable signs of this will be noticed in the *Romancers*, where those *fyttes* in the ballad which refer to the Spanish king's ingratitude and treachery, are less striking in tone and metaphor, than those in which the Cid gives expression to his own

conduct and feelings. The tyrant visits him in his banishment, having said to his retainers very significantly—

"When an old man is a sword,
Then the coffin is a sheath."

The Cid bids his enemy welcome, divining that he is not without a coward's fear as he approaches the threshold.

"Enter, Sire! O King! my guest!
For but one star shines in Heaven.

"Shines in depths of darkest night,
'Tis not riches, love or fame;
But the torch of truth and right,
Loyalty and stainless name.

"And I pray my prayer be heard,
I upon whose breastplate lie,
Snowflakes of the silver beard—
That whene'er I come to die,

"Be the day or near or far,
Whensoever God sees fit;
From the shining of that star
Round my bier the lamps be lit."

In this Pyrenean cycle, so well beloved by Hugo, no tale is more profoundly pathetic than is told in 'Paternity.'

"Father and son
Both heroes—peers—
Grandees of Spain."

inhabit a grand old fortress longtime held against the Moors. They are both of the same type of warlike chivalry, but the father's creed was the finer of the two; and, one unlucky day, Don Ruy, having sought permission to pass across a neighbouring state, and having been rudely refused, resented the insult with all the violence of the time. He entered the territory with all his band and sacked the town.

"He showed nor grace
Nor pity—and three days the sun went down
Upon this horror."

And this is why the father struck the son.

"Then," said Don Ruy, "I go—
An insult is a sling which throws the soul
Into the pit of darkness—I go hence
And have a right to wrath, for an offence
From sire to son is of so deep a dye,
That 'tis the end and death of infancy—
The desert is my place!"

Hardly has the offender passed from sight than Don Jayme repents

of his violence; blinded with tears he descends into the crypt, where his ancestors are buried, and kneeling before the statue of his own father gives way to a very passion of grief.

It is one of Hugo's pure touches of nature.

He recalls his own youth in his self-inflicted desolation—his own love, reverence, and submission, making his appeal for sympathy to the cold stone in the most pathetic words, and one can hardly find it extravagant when by one of those inspired fancies with which all readers of the 'Legend,' must be familiar, the pitiful story closes with a miracle:

> "And hand no eye could see
> Passed with sublime caress above his head."

The sword of retribution which ends the cruelties of Rathbert, tyrant of Italy, and which is seen by a holy monk to be wiped by an archangel on the clouds of Heaven, is another of these splendid impossibilities, and through this very much longer story, another delicate thread is woven by the tenderest recital of the love of an old warrior for his little murdered grandchild.

These heroes of an almost forgotten time are the most vivid of all Victor Hugo's creations, and amongst them stands pre-eminent the magnificent figure of Eviradnus, grander even than Roland, and even than the Cid. His mission is the same—to fight single-handed against a world of injustice—to protect the helpless and punish the malefactor; but unlike the knights errant of convention, "by fairy fiction drest," he is no dweller in enchanted garden; he is a mortal man, and old: hardship, weariness and peril have been his life-long companions, he has pity on the weak because he is strong, and to the wicked shows no mercy. He has a fit setting in the old feudal Hall of Corbus, where we again trace the likeness of those ruined castles in the Rhineland which inspired 'Les Burgraves,' and always clung faithfully to the poet's recollection. We see before us the ruined keep, the crumbling battlements half hidden in their mocking garlands the moss and weed, the pits where torrents rose and fell—the secret dens—the precipices—the solitude and gloom without—within the spectral banquet and the still more spectral forms of iron knights on monstrous steeds—the effigies of dead and buried warriors.

The story tells that in Lusatia, on the death of the reigning prince, his successor is bound to keep vigil in the ruined Keep of Corbus, alone, and is there visited by the spectres of his ancestors.

Even women are not exempt from the ordeal, and when Mahand, young and lovely princess, came to reign, she had to face it.

Two neighbouring kings, renowned for their unscrupulous and wicked deeds, determined to obtain possession of herself and her inheritance, and under the disguise of Troubadours, presented themselves at her court, where merrymaking was the order of the day.

Eviradnus, unseen in one of the sheltered glades of the forest,

overheard them as they whispered together hatching their infamous plots, and rapidly devised a scheme to undermine them. He had no time to lose, for the evening was closing in, and the ruin was already lighted for the ghostly banquet. Passing like a shadow by the conspirators, he makes his way to the castle accompanied by his page, who is dismissed as soon as he learns from younger eyes than his own that the Princess is on her way escorted by the Troubadours, whose guardianship she has unsuspiciously accepted. He watches their approach, and then surveys the cavernous hall with its long files of iron men, and turning to the table spread with delicacies, would very willingly have helped himself to a draught of the rich red wine, for he is weary, but he reflects that a drop left in the cup, or a stain upon the cloth might betray him : he refrains, and lifting one of the iron horsemen from the saddle, takes his place. Closing his vizor,

> "He sits a thing of stone : the very tomb
> Had been deceived !"

The lights and shadows here are very finely touched in a succession of quickly changing pictures. We see the moonlit glade through which the lady and the minstrels pass—the threshold of the sombre ruin which they cross with gay and careless jesting—the table with its legendary chandeliers—its golden flagons. We see Mahand in her trance, and her murderers as they are about to carry her to the oubliette, prepared to hide the evidence of their crime, when they are paralysed with terror, at what they imagine the supernatural appearance of the nearest spectre knight descending from his steed.

Eviradnus scorns to take advantage of their panic : he likes not to be dreaded *otherwise than with the fear to which he's used*—he lays down his armour and there follows the unequal combat with its ghastly finish.

The peaceful dawn has come when Mahand opens her eyes—

> "And thinks she dreams when at her side she sees,
> A Knight in armour on his bended knees."

After the cycle of Kings and Paladins, we reach the 16th century—Renaissance Paganism—in which the rise of artistic instinct and feeling is described in an allegory—the story of a Satyr who is brought by Hercules into the midst of the gods at Olympus, and sings of nature—of the beauty of the universe—of man and the emancipation of man, in a sort of poetical inspiration and ecstasy.

As he sings, he gradually loses his humble shape. The Faun rises into a god and proclaims himself to be Pan—the spirit that moves through all things.

This flight of fancy amongst ancient myths, has of course found many cavillers. His limitless imagination leads him into realms where he is not easy to follow, and he was severely censured for what critics called his caprices.

He had an answer ready, and declared that he was not aware how the limits of art were defined—that he did not know the precise geography of the intellectual world, and that he had not seen any map of its various routes, with its frontiers between the possible and the impossible marked out in red and blue.

Strikingly original in every conception, Victor Hugo possesses in an extraordinary degree what may be called the vision of things invisible, and he is stronger than any other poet in his power of developing an idea by a series of analogies all manifestly appropriate and just. Although image may be piled on image—symbol upon symbol—nothing is allowed to obscure the clearness of the original thought, and abnormal objects are made to appear familiar.

Still it is quite possible that the general reader will turn with a feeling of relief from the story of the Satyr, to the Infanta's Rose—'a crowning flower of song'—parable of the broken Armada, suggested by a wrecked fleet of drifting petals.

The last volume of the 'Legend' contains three fine historical sketches needing no charm of imagination, but still embellished by the poet's sympathy with all that is heroic.

'Jean Chouan' a tale of La Vendée—'Civil war'—'and Eylan Cemetery,' of which it has been said there is no better fighting in the Iliad.

Before the number dedicated to "The little ones," of which the story of 'Petit Paul' is the gem, the meditative Alexandrine gives way to a lyric which must touch all hearts.

Napoleon returns to Paris after the last battle—a broken man. For three days he wanders about alone in his deserted Palace, watched only by the sentinels, who as his shadow passed

> "Saw in the Emperor's face
> The Empire's fall."

Crushed and forsaken, he still maintains that supreme belief in himself and in his star, which in every reverse of fortune never abandoned him, and exclaims

> "I shall return—
> The sea shall bear me on
> To my deliverance!
> Victor I shall return!
> O Paris! France!

The manner of his return, deaf to the conquering march—to the roar of cannon—the acclamations of the people—blind even to the presence of the grim veterans last of the old guard who stoop to kiss his horse's feet—is told with the deepest feeling, it is one of the pictures in words which cannot be surpassed.

If it were possible to choose from out this abundance, this prodigality of riches, the best sample of the poet's comprehensive genius, one might name 'Poor people' as containing many of his salient points.

He has often touched upon the humble heroism of which he was

an eye-witness on the coast of Guernsey, and always with the same sympathy for obscure sorrows and patience, but never before with such precision and detail, and such a variety of vivid pictures. One can almost listen for the sound of the sea and feel the blast of the storm.

"Whilst outside, menacingly,
Sinister ocean sobs."

We can see the poor small cabin where the fisherman's wife watches in an agony of fear—the little children sleeping, a nest of souls, and can almost hear the ceaseless tick of the old clock, in its case, 'like pulses in a vein.'

She goes out at length into the darkness and passes a hovel more ruinous than her own :

"The roof is tottering
And tufts of thatch and mosses writhe and swing.
She stops—she listens—not a sound : she calls—
Silence—her voice alone on darkness falls.
She knocks, and then as if e'en lifeless things
At times take pity, the door backward swings.
She enters : on the floor a woman lies—
A corpse—the spectre of dead miseries.
All that remains the last sad battle o'er,
Two children lie asleep upon the floor,
Under her gown which she had striven to fold,
To keep them warm whilst she was growing cold.
How peacefully they sleep, as if no sound
Could break the orphans' slumber, soft, profound ;
Not even were earth and sky together rent,
They fear no judgment, being innocent.
And the rain falls, slow drops each other chase,
Through the torn roof upon that white dead face ;
Falling like tears, as if the senseless clay
Wept for the angel that had passed away."

The passion of mercy in Jeannie's heart overcomes the reflection that her own five are hungry and that her husband risks his life to provide for them : she goes back with the orphans in her arms and waits for his return in hesitation, almost in fear.

She had no cause to fear : the sailor has all her own compassion for the "bits of things," and comforts her in the faith that when within his home there are more mouths to feed, he shall be made to catch more fish.

We know of no poet in any language whose telling of a plain un varnished tale is so touching or so delicate.

It is not the aspect of Victor Hugo's many-sided genius most familiar to English readers, but it will be doing them good service to point it out.

Much that is noticeable has been necessarily passed over, and we call to mind his own terse sentence :

"*J'en passe—et des meilleurs.*"

C. E. Meetkerke.

THE TOMB OF A PROPHET.

IN my young days, no writer had so great, and, I think I may say so beneficial an effect upon me as Oliver Wareham.

His influence, at that time, was rather deep than wide, his readers were not very numerous, nor were his works to be found on every railway bookstall; yet I believe few men read his 'Prose Poems' without becoming a friend of the author.

A friend in imagination that is, for no man with an equal literary reputation was so little known in literary circles; and it was only a week before my departure for India, that I discovered he lived in the town of Sandygate, a flourishing little place, the centre of a large, agricultural district in the Eastern counties.

It is strange how often, when you hear of a new place for the first time, you presently hear something quite fresh about it, immediately afterwards, from a new source.

The very day after I discovered Wareham's dwelling-place, I went to take leave of my newly-married cousin, Jane Oldcastle, and the chief subject of her conversation was a recent visit to her husband's relations at Clifbury.

"It's about a mile from Sandygate," she added, as she finished her account of the place.

"Sandygate!" I exclaimed. "Why that's where Oliver Wareham lives. Did you meet him while you were at Clifbury?"

"Oh, no!" replied Jane.

"Don't the Oldcastles know him?"

"No," said Jane again.

"Why not?" I asked.

"They couldn't. He's the registrar for births, deaths and marriages at Sandygate."

"But he's the author of 'Prose Poems.'"

"Oh, I believe he's clever. I remember when we were driving past the Registrar's office, one day, Colonel Oldcastle said to me in his funny way: 'There's a writing fellow lives in that house, Jane, and they say he's a very clever fellow too. Pity he isn't a gentleman, or we might ask him to dinner.' It was a pity certainly, for the dinners at Clifbury were just a little dull—and such a pack of women too, Mrs. Oldcastle and all those girls!" and Jane gave a little sigh at the remembrance.

"It's monstrous!" I exclaimed. "I'd stake my existence, that the author of 'Prose Poems' is a gentleman at heart; he has enough refinement, and tenderness of feeling, and intellect to furnish forth half-a-dozen gentlemen."

"Oh, we all know you are a Radical!" retorted Jane; "but just

wait till you are married yourself, and go and live near a country town, and then see if you'd visit a man, who lives in an ugly, little red-brick house, and whose wife isn't a bit a lady. His relations are quite low people, and one of his cousins is going to marry the Oldcastles' kitchen-maid! Even you would see he was impossible; and the Oldcastles are most particular. They don't visit anyone in Sandygate except the Rector, and he is one of the Framlingham family."

It was hopeless trying to make Jane see anything from my point of view, and I could not even glean the smallest facts about my hero, except those recorded in her last speech. But my enthusiasm was unabated, or even increased by what she had told me; and if I had not promised my mother that my five remaining days in England should belong to her, I should have started off upon a pilgrimage to Sandygate.

I contented myself with writing a letter to Wareham, impulsive, romantic, and no doubt foolish, which I sent to him the day before I sailed for India, and to which I never received an answer.

But I knew I had no right to expect one, and my admiration was in no wise affected by Wareham's justifiable neglect of me. 'Prose Poems' accompanied me to India, and was one of the few books which I carried about in my wanderings. Wareham was not a prolific writer; once or twice I was made happy by reading some contribution of his in one of the magazines; but it was five years before a fresh volume of his collected sketches, the well-known 'Afterwards' was published.

I ordered it immediately, and as soon as it reached the little station of Anjepoor, where I was then acting as assistant magistrate, I read the book through at a sitting.

The pale light of early morning was stealing across my compound when, at length, I withdrew my eyes from the book. I am not sure but the tears were standing in them, at least I felt profoundly moved.

In that last chapter there was an allusion to an unknown correspondent, and I had recognized a phrase out of that old, boyish letter of mine. I hardly knew why it had touched me so deeply, but I almost felt as if I had received a message from the dead.

The evening of the same day, as I was returning from my usual ride, I turned into the little club, where we Anglo-Indian exiles met each other, to hear what news might be going in the place.

"There's Sefton!" remarked one of the men, as he saw our popular station doctor coming along the road.

"He won't come in here to-night," said another.

"Why not?"

"Had bad news from home. His wife's brother is dead. A very clever fellow too, Oliver Wareham—perhaps you know his books."

"Oliver Wareham dead!" I exclaimed.

"Yes; but I didn't know he was a friend of yours."

I did not stop to reply. Dr. Sefton was just passing along on the opposite side of the road, and I ran hastily across and spoke to him.

I am afraid that, at first, I was rather incoherent, and Sefton seemed a little bewildered by my agitation.

"I was not aware that you knew my brother-in-law," he said, and then I was able to explain.

He listened to me very kindly.

"Come home with me, and see my wife; she will like to talk with you."

It is useless to recall our conversation.

To those who knew nothing of Wareham, our talk would seem strained and exaggerated; while it would be superfluous to describe to those who knew and loved him the feelings with which we spoke of him, flung suddenly together, as we were, by the shock of his death.

Later on I learnt that Wareham had lost a deeply-loved wife, and had left no near relation except one daughter, a girl of thirteen called Olivia.

I asked Sefton whether Wareham had ever suffered from the comparative neglect with which he had been treated, and the want of society at Sandygate.

"I like the way in which you well-born people limit the use of the word society to intercourse with such as yourselves," replied the doctor. "Don't run off with the idea that Wareham felt himself unappreciated and misunderstood. Few men were ever more heartily loved by those around them; he numbered half the people of Sandygate among his friends, and even John Vincent, who quarrelled with every one else, could never succeed in quarrelling with Wareham."

"Who is John Vincent?" I asked.

"Wareham's father-in-law, and a brave honest fellow in spite of his queer temper. He was foreman at the gun-cotton factory. You may remember the terrible explosion they had there ten years ago. Things would have been even worse than they were, if it had not been for Vincent's courage and presence of mind. Since then, they have moved the factory to Aldiston, five miles from the town. It is a desolate place for a child, but I suppose poor little Olivia must stay there till we can go home and look after her."

II.

My familiar intercourse with the Seftons was interrupted at the end of six months, by my transfer to Ferzerabad at the further end of the presidency.

We occasionally exchanged letters, but I did not see my friends again before they left India, some three years later, and travelled

slowly to England, spending a month or two in Italy on their way home. During these years the fame of Wareham had grown with surprising rapidity, and when, after ten years of India, I once more set foot in England, 'Prose Poems' was in its fifteenth edition and 'Afterwards' had reached its twelfth.

Everybody knew Wareham's name, and everybody had read his books—or said he had.

I suppose it is always trying to the original followers of a man of genius, when their hero becomes the object of promiscuous admiration and misapplied adjectives, and the prevalent Wareham worship irritated me a little unreasonably.

I could not even make up my mind to pay my long-deferred visit to Sandygate, till I received a pressing invitation from Jane Oldcastle to come and see her at Clifbury.

Old Colonel Oldcastle had been gathered to his fathers, the dowager and "all those girls" had retired to Bournemouth, and Jane and her husband ruled in their stead.

Sandygate was the station for Clifbury, a commonplace little town, with wide clean streets and small houses. I turned my steps towards the old grey church, and walked around the well-filled churchyard. At the highest part of the ground there was a pretty view of Sandygate, seen through overarching trees, and here I found the object of my search.

A simple gravestone recorded the name of Emma, wife of Oliver Wareham, with her age and the date of her death. Beneath it ran a still shorter inscription, "Also of Oliver Wareham her husband." "Bury me at her feet, and put those words on her tomb," had been his funeral directions; and his friends had paid him the tribute of obedience.

I thanked them in my heart, as I thought of his simple truthful life, blest by a great love and glorified by a great gift, and then I turned away to keep my appointment with Jane Oldcastle.

I received a friendly welcome from my cousin and her husband, and I was pleased to meet young Framlingham, an old schoolfellow of mine, and a good-natured, honest fellow, though not over-abundantly furnished with brains.

Our other guests were the Vicar of Clifbury and the Rector of Sandygate, and during a pause in the conversation I spoke to the Rector of my visit to Sandygate churchyard, and of how pleased I had been with Oliver Wareham's tomb.

Had I suddenly fired off a pistol at the dinner table, it would hardly have created more consternation than my innocent remark.

The Rector and the Vicar exchanged involuntary glances, Oldcastle's face flushed an angry red, and Framlingham's milder countenance was dyed a scarlet hue.

Jane, who had given a little gasp of dismay, was the first to recover herself, and adroitly changed the conversation; but later in the

evening, when I found myself alone with her for a few minutes, I asked what was the meaning of the little scene.

"Poor Wareham seems to have become as explosive as dynamite."

"Oh, please don't say anything about it," said Jane eagerly. "It makes George so angry. Wait till to-morrow. George will be out for the whole morning, and then you can get Mr. Framlingham to tell you all about it. He won't much like it, but he's so good-natured, that that doesn't matter. Now George——"

"Never mind George. I want you to sing to me, Jane. You promised to have a fine voice, when I left England."

"Promised!" exclaimed Jane, with a toss of her head; but she went to the piano all the same, and the evening ended in harmony.

III.

"Mr. Framlingham," said Jane, the next morning, "my cousin wants you to tell him that strange story about the Wareham memorial."

"Oh! come now, Mrs. Oldcastle, that's a little rough on me—now isn't it?" pleaded poor Framlingham.

"Not at all," said Jane. "However," she added, relenting a little, "I'll begin the story for you; only mind, when I come to your part in it, you must tell it yourself."

Framlingham assented, with melancholy submission, and Jane addressed herself to me.

"It is very tiresome to have a genius living within a mile of your house, especially when he's only a registrar, and you can't possibly ask him to dinner.

"Colonel Oldcastle wouldn't have dreamt of such a thing. But people are so stupid and inconsiderate, that when this Wareham died, and the newspapers published little lives of him, and mentioned that he lived at Sandygate, everybody seemed to think we must have known him.

"People used to be so surprised we hadn't done so; it was most disagreeable. I think it was very tiresome of the newspapers to say he was a native of Sandygate—just as if it mattered to any one!

"We met a good many Americans in London, that season, and they were most absurd about Wareham. Stella Vanburgh actually asked me, if I didn't think it a privilege to have had him for a fellow-citizen; and yet she's a really nice girl, with the prettiest curly fringe to her hair, and eighty thousand pounds of her own!

"We really got quite worried about the man, and the Framlinghams were just as badly off—weren't you?" said Jane, appealing to her other companion.

"I didn't care," replied Framlingham. "Wareham was a very good fellow, I often met him in Sandygate, and he knew a horse when he saw one, as well as any man in Sandyshire."

"Ah, but your brother didn't like it, neither did Lady Framlingham," said Jane. "Besides, everybody was talking of those books—you know what I mean,—prosy poems, or something of that sort. Then Sir Gilbert is so very conscientious; he got it into his head that he hadn't done his duty by Wareham. He thought he ought to have encouraged him."

"Gilbert's a great man for encouraging everything," said his brother, particularly when it's local. Genius, and industries, and races; he encourages all of them in his own neighbourhood. He feels he owes it to the county."

"That's why he's so popular, and such a model country gentleman," said Jane; "but he was too sensitive about Wareham."

"Is George also pining because he didn't encourage Wareham?" I asked.

"Not exactly. But he was put out about it, and at last he said, 'Let's do something for the man, and be——,' but never mind exactly what George said.

"He and Sir Gilbert agreed that something had better be done, and Mr. Hunter, the mayor of Sandygate, agreed with them, and so did everybody else, except a disagreeable Dr. Sefton, who was a relation of Wareham's.

"Instead of sending us a handsome subscription, he wrote an absurd letter, saying he believed the proposed memorial would be contrary to Oliver Wareham's wishes, and almost enough to make his ghost return to earth, and pull it down.

"Just as if any of us cared about Oliver Wareham's wishes!

"The letter made George very angry, and he vowed there should be a memorial to Wareham in Sandygate, though all the ghosts in the churchyard got up and opposed it. George is somewhat obstinate, and he persuaded the others to put up a statue of Wareham in the churchyard, as near as possible to Wareham's grave.

"He had no proper tombstone, you know, only a corner of his wife's, which looked very shabby; and when foreigners and Americans and learned sort of people come down here and want to see his tomb, of course there's nothing to show them, and they look disappointed and say 'oh,' as if it were our fault."

Jane sighed as she spoke, and I felt it was inconsiderate in a man of genius to have got himself born in Sandygate.

"We worked very hard," she continued, "and got quite a handsome sum, enough to order a statue from Baron von Bergfeld. Everybody goes to von Bergfeld, now-a-days: besides, he is a friend of Lady Framlingham's, and generally comes to her receptions. It was unlucky that he had never seen Wareham, and there wasn't a portrait to be got of the man, for love or money. But von Bergfeld is so clever; he made a large pedestal with bas-reliefs upon it from Wareham's works, and an ideal statue to put on the top of it. Really, the likeness didn't matter. Those Americans and

people had never seen him; the only persons who could have told if it was like, were the natives of Sandygate, and they were of no consequence.

"It was a lovely thing, and though they wouldn't have it in the Royal Academy, everybody knows the academicians are jealous of foreigners."

"But what has become of this work of art?" I inquired.

"You shall hear. Von Bergfeld sent the thing down, and Dawson the stonemason, who does all the tombstones in Sandygate, was charged with putting it up. Sir Gilbert said we must employ Dawson to encourage local trade; and we had arranged to have a nice little ceremony on the 20th of February, when Lady Framlingham was to unveil the statue.

"On the morning of the 19th, Giles, the police sergeant from Sandygate, came up and spoke to George. He told him he believed there must be a plot in Sandygate to destroy the memorial. He was rather mysterious about it, and had no evidence against any particular person; but he had an impression that the lower classes in Sandygate did not like the memorial; and there was an expectation in the town, that something would happen to prevent the ceremony from taking place next day.

"George was put out; he said that it wasn't his business, as a magistrate, to attend to impressions and expectations. And then he forgot the matter till dinner-time, when he told Mr. Framlingham and me about it.

"It reminded me of the warning which somebody sent somebody about the Gunpowder plot, and Mr. Framlingham said Giles was a shrewd fellow, and generally knew what he was talking about.

"Then George got anxious, and Mr. Framlingham offered to walk over to Sandygate with him and see if things were quiet there. "And now, I think I have told my share," concluded Jane abruptly. We both looked at Framlingham.

"Mind," said he, "I don't believe what I am going to tell you."

"Then why tell it?"

"Because it's the story. Oldcastle and I left this house at eleven o'clock, and went to Sandygate, where every one seemed to be asleep.

"Oldcastle took his revolver with him, which I thought a mistake. I don't like fire-arms, except, of course, in a regular way, or for birds or four-footed creatures. At other times they are apt to get people into trouble, or into those beastly newspapers, which is almost as bad.

"The statue was all right when we got to the churchyard; it looked white in the light of a very bright moon.

"We sat down and watched, but there wasn't a sound till the clock struck twelve. Then Oldcastle turned to me and said it was all humbug, and we had better go home.

"The words were hardly out of his mouth, when we saw a man standing on the little platform beside the statue. The moon shone

full upon his face, and we saw Oliver Wareham as plainly as I now see you. There could be no mistake about him; his was not a common face, and even his dress was just as it used to be. He had on an old blue riding-cloak, which used to hang behind the door in his office, and was lined with a dark and white check stuff. As he stood there, a little gust of wind blew back a corner of the cloak, and showed the check lining. I could have sworn to that cloak among a thousand.

"His head was thrown back, so that we could see his face in spite of his big felt hat, and he looked quite young again, as he used to look before his wife died and he fell ill.

"I forgot he was dead, and called out 'Hullo! Wareham,' and was running up to shake hands with him, when Oldcastle pulled me back.

"'What are you thinking of?' he cried. 'I'm not going to be made a fool of like this. Let me put a bullet into the rascal, and we'll see if he's dead or alive.'

"Oldcastle was white with rage, and had got his revolver pointed at Wareham. I was just in time to knock the barrel up, and the charge went off into the air.

"'What do you mean by that?' roared Oldcastle, and, for a moment, I believed he meant to put a second shot into me. Then, I thought he had actually fired, but the report was too loud for a revolver; a revolver doesn't shake the ground so that you stagger backwards as Oldcastle and I did, till we each clutched hold of the other, to steady ourselves a bit.

"Then we stood still and turned round to look again at Wareham. But he was gone, and the memorial had disappeared with him. There were little bits of marble, scattered all over the place, but we never saw anything more of Wareham.

"Oldcastle was wild with me for not letting him shoot, but if you've been friendly with a fellow, you can't stand by and see him potted at, and Wareham was always a good sort.

"That's what I saw. I can't explain anything, but I don't believe in ghost stories. This is a ghost story, so I don't believe it, as I told you at the beginning."

"Can you explain it?" I asked Jane. She shook her head.

"I wish I could. It's absurd believing in ghosts; and I don't choose to be absurd, and yet——"

"I'd give half I am worth not to have gone to Sandygate that night!" exclaimed Framlingham. It's impossible to believe in ghosts, you know, and it's impossible to doubt your own eyes. Then, I don't like to think of Wareham doing a thing like that. He was such a kind-hearted fellow when he was alive, it's strange he should come back to play such a nasty trick on one. It fairly muddles a fellow's mind."

"It's a strange tale," I said, as I took my leave. "If ever I come upon the explanation, I will relieve your mind."

But when I said this, I spoke rashly.

IV.

"So they never put up that memorial to Oliver after all," said Mrs. Sefton to me a week later on, when I was spending a few days with her and the doctor. "Well, it was a foolish scheme," she continued, but why was it not carried out?"

"You don't mean to say you have not heard the story!" I exclaimed.

"We were in Rome at the time," put in Dr. Sefton, "and we only returned to England on hearing that old John Vincent had died suddenly, and our niece Olivia was dangerously ill. My wife hurried to Aldiston, nursed the poor child back to life again, and, as soon as she could be moved, we took her abroad with us. We were nearly two years on the Continent and only came back to England three months ago.

"But Aldiston is only five miles from Sandygate," I objected "surely the tale had travelled so far."

Dr. Sefton said nothing, and left his wife to answer my remark.

"I suppose I was too much engrossed with Olivia to notice anything," she said; "but please to tell me the story, now you have excited my curiosity."

I complied with her request; but, as Jane Oldcastle had truly said, it was a tale which was not to be believed in, when heard at second hand. Mrs. Sefton laughed when I had finished it.

"It is too grotesque," she exclaimed, "to imagine that Oliver's ghost should return to earth, to spite the neighbours who had not asked him to dinner."

"Perhaps Lady Framlingham and Mrs. Oldcastle set a higher value on their dinners than you do," said Dr. Sefton; "and I have an idea that a good many people—Old John Vincent, among others—considered that they did not appreciate Oliver as they should. But don't say anything about all this before Olivia," he added, with a sudden look of anxiety in his face. "I can hear she is just come in."

"What quick ears you have!" said his wife, and a minute later, Olivia Wareham entered the room. She was a very tall and handsome girl, who looked a good deal older than her age, for she was only eighteen. At first, I thought this might be the result of ill-health; but Dr. Sefton told me, later on, it was the effect of the solitary life she had led with her grandfather at Aldiston, and the passionate grief she had experienced at her father's death.

She had a dreamy expression in her dark eyes, and took little share in our conversation, but she was evidently a good listener, and when she spoke, I was struck with the beauty of the voice.

Though we attended to Dr. Sefton's warning about the ghost story, our talk seemed continually to recur to the subject of Wareham; and

while we were having dinner, I asked Mrs. Sefton if she could not show me a likeness of her brother.

"Only that," she replied, pointing to her niece; "Olivia might pass for her father any day, if you dressed her up in man's clothes."

Olivia suddenly put up her hand to her head.

"Oh, Aunt Clara!" she exclaimed, "what you say reminds me of something which I dreamt when I was ill,—what could it have been?"

"Don't try to remember," said her uncle hastily; "you will bring back your headaches again, if you are not careful."

"Ah! you have made me forget," she said; "I should have remembered, I think, if you had not interrupted me."

A look of relief passed over Dr. Sefton's face. It occurred to me that this was the second time he had wished to keep something from his niece. Could there be any connection between the two subjects? He may have noticed the question in my face, for he turned to me with an explanation.

"You know that Olivia was very ill two years ago. Her illness has resulted in a complete loss of memory of all the time she spent with her grandfather. She remembers nothing from the time of her father's death, till the day when she woke up to find that Aunt Clara had come back from India, and was taking care of her."

"And I do so want to know all about it," said Olivia, "but Uncle James will tell me nothing."

"But, dear child, we know nothing," said Dr. Sefton; "remember, we were in India all that time."

"Of course," agreed Olivia; "and you have given me such good things to recollect since I have been with you, and I used to be so happy with my father before, it is greedy of me to worry after those three lost years, as if I had not got enough happiness to remember."

"And would it be happiness if you did remember?" was the question which rose to my lips; but I had the discretion to keep silent, and then the two ladies rose, and left me alone with Dr. Sefton.

We were silent for some minutes, and then I looked up to find my companion's eyes were fixed upon my face, as if he had been reading every strange idea, every wild surmise, which had been rushing through my mind during those brief moments.

We exchanged one of those glances, which say more than many words can tell, and then Sefton stretched out his hand to me.

"You will keep my secret," he said.

I laid my hand in his, in token of assent, and he continued:

"Even my wife has no suspicion of the truth, and you and I will never put it into words. It is like the secret of King Midas, not to be breathed, even to the reeds by the riverside."

"And no one else suspects?" I inquired.

"Not a soul."

We have kept our own counsel, and the mystery attending Oliver Wareham's reappearance has remained unsolved.

None knew how far Olivia's mind had been unhinged by her father's death. When the monument was put up, knowing how he would have disliked it, she brooded over it until she was no longer accountable for what she did. Sallying forth one evening, dressed in her father's clothes, a packet of gunpowder under her arm, she went to the churchyard. What happened the reader knows: how she laid her train and escaped uninjured will never be known. The next day she was raving in brain fever, and when she recovered, her memory for those recent events had gone. She never recovered those three lost years; it has fallen to my lot to supply her with other and, I trust, happier memories.

Jane Oldcastle meets her in London sometimes, and is graciously pleased to approve of her manner and appearance. "Though where she gets that style of hers is a mystery," remarks my cousin, with her usual plain-speaking. We are still good friends, though I decline all invitations to Clifbury, and Jane triumphs over me, as she remarks:

"Ah! radical opinions are all very well for unmarried men; but, you see, now you are married, you object to kitchenmaid cousins as much as anybody. You will never bring Olivia within ten miles of Sandygate."

"Never," I reply.

Olivia has acquiesced in my decision. I have persuaded her that it will be better not to try and pull aside the veil, which has been so mercifully drawn across those three troubled years.

For a time, I feared the blank might still be a source of unhappiness to her; but my mind was set at rest after our first child was born, when I chanced to hear a few words which she and Mrs. Sefton exchanged upon the subject.

"Has the memory of what happened before your illness ever returned to you, Olivia?" asked her aunt.

"Not a gleam," replied Olivia.

"I hope you don't worry about it as you used to do."

"Oh, no! I am quite satisfied now."

"Because you are so happy?"

"Perhaps. But really, I think I am content to know nothing, because I feel sure my husband knows all."

"My dear," exclaimed Mrs. Sefton, "you are just like me, for I am certain that my husband knows all about it too."

Then they both kissed each other, and as I walked softly away, I said to myself "the ways of women are strange."

LETTERS FROM SOUTH AFRICA.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "In the Lotus-Land," etc., etc.

Cape Town, *April*, 1893.

CARE Amice,—My first letter came to an abrupt ending, for which no doubt you were duly grateful. The pen having run away with the charms and counter-charms of Madeira, I had to pass over the voyage, and barely announce our anchorage under the giant shadow of Table Mountain.

With regard to that voyage, I do not know that there is much more to record. I can only say that a journey in one of these monster vessels, gives opportunity for a life as mildly dissipated as anything to be found under the sun. There is no fear that time will hang heavily upon the hands. Talk to me no more of the repose of a sea-trip. The idea is a delusion. It is nothing but a succession of sports, including sack-races and every other race ever invented; cricket; chess and other tournaments; concerts, dances, fancy-dress balls, all following each other in breathless array. In short, life is nothing but a round of frivolity; harmless, no doubt, but perhaps a little too much for anything but the boundless energy and insatiable appetite of twenty-one.

The mornings began with sweepstakes upon the day's run, the great excitement of the twenty-four hours. The numbers drawn were separately put up to auction, and those numbers supposed to be nearest the run often went up to a high price. It was not a Dutch auction after the manner of the little Madeira boys with their bouquets—nor was it as picturesque and interesting. But it was quite professionally executed, with nothing amateurish about it, and was often very amusing. Many went in for it with great earnestness—even some of the ladies as well as the men: why not, indeed, in these days of women's rights and men's wrongs? And some were winners, and some of course were losers.

Even from the far-off bridge, one could hear the persuasive tones of the auctioneer rising in excitement as the bidding grew bold for a likely number, finally knocked down amidst applause; only too probably to prove, at twelve o'clock, when the twenty-four hours' run was recorded, eight or ten miles out of the reckoning and a dead loss to its owner. But gains and losses were all taken as matters of indifference, as befitted the owners of gold fields and diamond mines and unlimited fortunes.

When the auction was going on, Mrs. S. would often be sitting beside me, watching the lovely sea, talking of past times, breaking off every now and then to listen to the applause at the other end.

"Poor things!" she would say—a favourite expression of hers: "I am so glad they can find amusement on board. It makes the time pass quickly for them—and that seems to be their chief desire in life. When they get to my age they will find that it passes quickly enough without the help of excitement."

That was quite true; but we must all live our experiences.

There was nothing to be seen about us but a wide waste of calm waters; the magnificent ocean; some days blue, more often green. Far as the eye could reach, nothing but water, ever undergoing a sea-change, on which the sun poured his intense rays. Day after day the sky would be absolutely cloudless. There were no birds of the air to disturb the vision, but all around us were myriads of flying-fish, flying a foot or two above the waters, then darting in to the luxury of their cool depths: beautiful little creatures with thin gauzy wings that seemed to shine out with all the colours of the rainbow; curious links in creation between the elements. Small whales we occasionally saw; now and then a dolphin; in certain waters, the beautiful nautilus, floating along with its sail set, looking far too fragile and ethereal to be an inhabitant of the wide ocean.

One day H. and I, happening to be looking over the sides, discovered a swordfish: an object so rare that Captain Robinson declared he had only seen one twice in all his experience. No one else chanced to be looking, and no one else saw it; and some thought we must have dreamed the vision, and others wanted the Captain to put back in search of the curiosity. It was certainly a beautiful and a strange creature. Their strength is extraordinary; many weigh as much as three hundred pounds; and they have been known to dig their swords many inches into a ship's side, making a hole sufficient to send her down if they withdrew it.. But as a rule it breaks, with very much the sensation, one would suppose, of tooth-drawing, and they depart shorn of their weapon, which, unlike a lobster's claw, does not grow again. Whether it is their death-blow, like the sting of the bee, I cannot tell you.

Mrs. S. delighted in the flying-fish, as she delighted in all things beautiful, and would quite regret the days on which they did not show themselves. For they had their caprices like the rest of creation—fish, flesh, fowl, and good red herring.

The concerts were not a great success, for the musical talent on board was not of a high order; but there are voyages when the celebrities are in sufficient numbers to form very delightful evenings.

Perhaps the great event of the voyage under discussion was the fancy-dress ball, given when we were passing through the tropics; and the condition of collars and starched materials and Christy Minstrel

Cape Town.

faces when the evening was over is not to be described. It had occupied many days of hard work and thought, and brought not a few to the verge of brain-fever. No one had come provided for the occasion, and the results were miracles of ingenuity. One of the ship's officers came out as a Scotch chief, having turned a red table-cloth into a tartan-plaid, buckled at the shoulder by an immense cairngorm four inches in circumference, which many on board supposed to have been the last great diamond from the Kimberley mines, the property of a fortunate passenger.

Invitations had gone out from Father Neptune, and replies had to be given in rhyme, all to be read out on a certain afternoon in the saloon, when the ball had become a thing of the past. We had no poet-laureate on board, any more than just now we have one on shore, and for much the same cause; and in many of the replies one had to search long both for rhyme and reason. But, as the ever memorable Vicar of Wakefield observed, what was wanting in wit was made up in laughter, and so the end was attained.

The presiding deity was Amphitrite, wife of Neptune; a lady who appeared an embodiment of floating clouds of gauze, holding a gold trident, supposed to be symbolical of the gold-fields of South Africa, with a head-dress and ruff of coral *à la* Queen Elizabeth. And, as in the case of the good Queen, one was always wondering what would happen next, for the gauzy drapery was so cunningly arranged—glued together, as it were, with Portland cement—that one feared every moment to see the whole affair evaporate, leaving in place of Amphitrite, a weeping Niobe or a modern Lady Godiva. Fortunately the invisible fastening was equal to the rough usage it received. One gentleman, tall and stout, appeared as a baby in low neck dress, short sleeves, and very short petticoats; I leave you to imagine the effect; whilst another, of goodly age and weight and grey flowing locks, was his nurse, adorned with poke bonnet, wig, and shawl—a sort of Sarah Gamp performance; very laughable, no doubt, but *tant soi peu outré* —and carrying a bottle, supposed to be filled with something stronger than milk and water.

"Shall you go to-night?" I asked Mrs. S. on the morning of the eventful day.

"For a few minutes," she replied; "just to see what it is like; and then come away. I should feel out of place at a fancy dress ball. Those days for me are over."

"Then we will keep together," I said. "As we are admitted in plain clothes, I will come too. After that we will take possession of the Captain's cabin and spend a quiet evening." And so it happened.

The ball was of course held on deck which had been got up with brilliant lights and decorated with flags, and looked very striking. The whole thing was supposed to be a great success, to which the ship's excellent band: composed of a certain number of the stewards,

GOVERNMENT AVENUE.

who were also good musicians: added its full share. The refreshments down-stairs were extremely popular, especially Buszard's ices, which had been brought out from England and had reposed in the ice-room for the occasion. Certainly, ices are not out of place in the tropics.

One night, between one and two in the morning, Captain Robinson came to our deck cabin and roused us out to have a look at Teneriffe as we passed it.

The night was glorious; stars flashed in the dark blue heavens, and all the great constellations were visible: the Northern Crown, Southern Cross, Scorpion, and others. Not far off, in the darkness, rose in dim outlines the peak of Teneriffe, slightly veiled in mist. Nothing could have been more beautiful and poetical, more strangely solemn, in the utter stillness and repose of night. The outline, sloping upwards on either side to a point, was almost as perfect as if fashioned geometrically. Nothing disturbed its quiet; no sound, no visible moving object. As a beautiful dream it appeared, and as a dream it vanished. The stars and the water, the immense wide space melting away in the darkness, the whole beauty of night, enveloped everything in majesty and mystery.

So the days passed easily and pleasantly, and the voyage came to an end, as you have already heard: and the passengers separated and went their several ways.

That first night we landed for a short walk and a first impression of Cape Town under the stars. As far as one could judge, it looked very colonial and very new, though some of it is old enough. But you must not imagine it possesses in the least degree any of the beauty of age and architecture, of form and outline, one meets with in ancient Europe. Of this you had warned me, but without warning one knew what to look for in a comparatively new country. I never had any illusions about South Africa: and expecting little, shall not be disappointed. Indeed, already a few things have proved an agreeable surprise.

That first night we found the principal streets wide, as they always are in places where space is no object; a contrast in this one particular to the narrow streets of Cairo we trod together. But they were rough and uneven, and we plunged about occasionally, as people do when coming off a sea voyage: only here the reason lay in the roads, not in the sea. Everything of course was closed, as became an hour approaching midnight; streets were deserted, few lights were visible, all windows were darkened.

At the end of one of the thoroughfares, which had been a gradual ascent, we found the Cathedral: a very ordinary building with little to charm one. Soon after, we came to an avenue: Government Avenue, as it is called: and, unlike the cathedral, it was full of beauty and dignity: wonderful trees, many of which must have been planted by the Dutch settlers two hundred years ago; noble, magnificent, over-

arching, the stars overhead shining between leaves and branches; not one avenue but many, side by side, like the aisles of a splendid minster; and so lengthy that we thought we should never reach the end.

It was intensely solitary, and we found ourselves almost alone; deep shadows surrounded us, impenetrable gloom and darkness, here and there lightened at long intervals by a flickering lamp. In a new and strange country the effect was peculiar. Behind every tree we fancied an assassin might be lurking, ready for plunder: a descendant of the old Portuguese settlers who came over here ages ago. In such a solitude one might easily be murdered, and the culprit escape to safe quarters. I made some such remark to H.: nine parts fun, one part earnest. "I am armed," he laughed, "for I have my Norwegian dagger. You might run for it, whilst I slayed the assassin. I feel quite equal to the occasion."

And drawing, the blade flashed in a distant lamp light.

But there was no fear of anything of the kind. South Africa knows nothing of such gentlemen as Brazilian ruffians and Greek brigands. The laws of the country are not often broken, and life is safe. In reality the night walk through this avenue was delicious, full of grandeur, repose and beauty.

Presently, nearing the end, we suddenly heard music upon the air.

Then we came out upon a long upper road, the slopes in front of us apparently adorned with gardens and houses, habitations of the people of Cape Town. Here and there a late light gleamed in a window, but for the most part the houses shone out dark and white, closed and quiet in sleep. Beyond all rose the huge mountains, looking, in the mystery of night, threatening and ominous, with exaggerated outlines and impenetrable depths.

Down the long road came the music, which sounded like the twang of a mandolin. It was well played and there was a certain sweetness about it, but it rather disturbed the sacred midnight silence. Nearer and nearer it came, and then out of the darkness loomed some fifteen or twenty sturdy young men, marching, singing, careless, headed by the player. It looked a little like the end of an orgie devoted to Bacchus, and some had twined wreaths of hops, or something that looked like them, round their brigand-shaped hats.

As they passed they turned and seemed to wonder if we would not swell the procession. We let them get fairly ahead, the music stealing upon the night air more and more faintly; and then, out of respect to the small hours, retraced our steps down the solemn and beautiful avenues: gradually making our way back to the *Dunottar*, all the shipping in the harbour, and its forests of masts, standing out clearly against the night sky.

The *Dunottar* was in respectable repose. Every one had retired who could do so. The vessel seemed empty and deserted. One felt that a great crowd had departed, and cabin after cabin was now silent

and vacant. Only those remained on board who are oound for the ports of the coast: Port Elizabeth, East London, or Durban. Of such are we.

The next morning our first daylight experience of Cape Town began unfortunately. A sky overcast, mountains half buried in cloudland, the water in the harbour cold and grey. Before long rain came down with steady determination. We had arranged to take the Victoria drive round the mountain, but this was no longer possible. Even England could not show more unpleasant weather.

We went forth all the same, wondering for whose benefit this ill wind was blowing; certainly not for ours. If Cape Town had not looked specially attractive last night, it looked less so to-day. To the natives the weather seemed to make no difference; these bad days come so rarely that they consider them a pleasant change—just as we feel about a summer day in March. They splashed about and hurried to and fro, and every one seemed in excellent humour. There is something in the air of South Africa which promotes amiability. But the roads not being macadamised, their state may be imagined: many were difficult to cross, and some could not be crossed at all.

That morning we had said good-bye to Mrs. S., whose friends had come down to take possession of her until the Thursday evening, when the one weekly express train started for the distant towns of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. As she sat in the carriage, and leaned forward with her fair, pale, beautiful face, wishing us a hundred good-byes, we realised how much her presence on board had added to the pleasure of the voyage: and when she urged us to pay her and her son a visit in that far-away home up the country we promised if possible to do so. In a letter from her son, handed to her on first arriving, he had very kindly pressed us to go and stay with them, adding as an inducement that he would make me more intimately acquainted with Kaffir life and people, their huts, curious ways and customs, than might otherwise be possible.

That we shall be able to pay that visit is doubtful.

The day being unpleasant, we took the "favourable opportunity" of "doing the lions." The principal streets, I have said, show no special feature. Many of the buildings are handsome, but none are of great height, and as the streets are wide, there is a great deal of blue sky to be seen, a usual and charming feature in all colonial towns. Everything also is dwarfed by the magnificent Table Mountain under which Cape Town reposes. This alone would for ever redeem it from the commonplace. The Dutch element and influence are scarcely to be seen anywhere: and those who have heard much of the "Boers," and expect to find any of the quaintness of Holland, with its canals and tree-lined thoroughfares, its gabled houses with overhanging eaves and dormer windows, will be disappointed. The Dutch Reformed Church contains in the clock-

VICTORIA DRIVE.

tower a clock that was sent from Holland, but that is the only Dutch element about it: excepting eight old Dutch Governors, who sleep peacefully in the vaults beneath, surrounded by all the noise and traffic and success of the town they helped to establish.

Near the Cathedral, which as I have said is not by any means artistic, are the new Houses of Parliament: a building large and handsome in its way, whilst the interior is fitted up with a good deal of quiet dignity. Here the affairs of the State are discussed and settled: and the country having a great future before it, we shall gradually hear more and more of the proceedings in the various Parliaments of South Africa. At Cape Town, the House is surrounded by a well-kept garden. Just beyond this is the wonderful avenue we had made friends with in the darkness and repose of midnight. Equally fine and noble were the old oak trees by daylight, but less weird and mysterious. There were no deep shadows, no Portuguese descendants of brigands lurking about, thirsting for life and money also. A smart policeman patrolling up and down, looked reassuring. The Museum and Library are excellent, both containing very fine collections: the Library being especially rich in rare old manuscripts.

Every one about the streets seemed given up to business and hard work: there were no idlers, though this is not always the rule. Presently we came upon our gallant Captain, who, in spite of the weather, immediately proposed an excursion to the outskirts of Sea Point, where the pleasantest hotel of Cape Town is well situated, and where we might take an artistic luncheon by the sad sea waves. It is a sort of Land's End, and in rough weather the sea breaks and tumbles and dashes over the rocks in splendid fury, the wild birds scream and clang, and the winds of heaven seem to rage from all quarters of the compass at once.

It still rained in torrents, but as there is nothing like action, we at once accepted the proposal. A friendly tram came up at the moment, and we gladly accepted its shelter.

The suburbs are very pretty and picturesque. Small white houses with green shutters, built very much in the style of bungalows, reposing in well-kept gardens full of sweet-scented flowers. For flowers are still a-bloom, though it is the winter of their discontent. But this is quoting Shakespeare, not the people of Cape Town, where I fancy very little discontent finds its way. The roads being wide, the opposite neighbours are not at all inquisitive and interfering. Moreover, in these colonial suburbs neighbours are neighbours in every sense of the word: and probably fraternise with each other as if they were members of one family, drawn together by those bonds of sympathy which weave themselves naturally under alien skies. Not that some of these people have known any other skies, but the greater part talk English, and the true home of English seems to be England.

The tram stopped about a hundred yards or so from the hotel, and of course the rain at that moment was coming down at its worst. But no sooner had we all three arrived under shelter than the rain ceased and the clouds broke, Nature put on smiles and tears, and looked either very penitent for sin, or very sad for sorrow. Whatever it might be we rejoiced in the change.

The hotel facing the sea, was magnificent in situation, but rather unpleasantly crowded, as it generally is when a vessel comes in from England; yet the attentive landlady and her son did all in their power to make our short visit agreeable. Presently, with sunshine and flying clouds overhead, and smiles and tears about our path, we went down to the edge of the rocks, and in the clear green water

During the Victoria Drive.

found wonderful sea anemones of rare beauty and colour: a perfect aquarium of marvels. The rocks were rugged and picturesque, and far down to the left we traced the outlines of the broken magnificent coast of South Africa, which has scarcely its equal, gradually rising from the sea to the very summit of towering Table Mountain. After a quiet hour amongst the anemones, we returned to the town by the small railway which runs along the seashore and shows up every curve and change of the coast to perfection; the clear green water plashing upon the sand, rolling up in long lines of white foam, and rolling back upon itself; until pier and harbour came into view and the journey was over.

In spite of the rain our first day in South Africa had not been an unpleasant experience.

When we returned to the *Dunottar*, the great process of coaling was going on, the horrors of which can be better imagined than described.

The next day was bright even for a Cape day, and we decided to make hay whilst the sun shone. Captain Robinson had made every necessary arrangement in ordering a fashionable Cape conveyance in the form of a small wagonette; the stewards had packed up a sumptuous luncheon sufficient for three times three, and we started with fair wind and weather for the famous Victoria drive.

On each side of Table Mountain is another mountain: one to the left called the Devil's Peak, one to the right the Lion's Head. These form a mass of extraordinary magnificence. Table Mountain rises to a height of 4000 feet, whilst the straight line of the summit, whence its name, is traced for a length of two miles. The Devil's Peak rises 3300 feet, the Lion's Head 2000 feet. Table Mountain is almost precipitous, and almost unrivalled; a huge wall of barren rock; yet easily ascended from certain points. The only danger arises from the sudden downfall of clouds, which frequently happens; and then, unless accompanied by a guide, it is wisest to remain stationary until the clouds lift again: an unpleasant and uncertain waiting.

The drive is very long, and the sun intensely hot. If this was winter, we wondered what summer could be like. But it really is autumn, and not winter, though one sees few of the autumn tints which make an English autumn so beautiful. Vegetation is of a different nature: there is no "lingering in death." We went out by Sea Point, which we had seen yesterday all smiles and tears, and were glad to see again to-day all sunshine. The suburbs, too, looked better for the change, and one felt that life in many a house we saw must pass very pleasantly.

Leaving Cape Town and its suburbs well behind us, we entered upon one of the most wonderful drives in the world: a drive of inconceivable beauty and grandeur from beginning to end.

For some six or seven hours we revelled in a succession of scenes that alone are worth a voyage to South Africa. The road to begin with is well placed on the mountain side, high above the ocean. Nothing can be finer than the line of coast, with its bold, magnificent rocks, over which the waves for ever surge and break. Point after point stretching out into a succession of lovely bays, and the sea to-day rolled over the white sand with a soothing, sleepy murmur: the most wonderfully green, transparent water imaginable. Not more lovely the waters of the Mediterranean which you have watched beating against the classic shores of Alexandria: not more lovely the waters which flow upwards to the mouth of your beloved Golden Horn.

To our left rose the towering mountains; the Lion's Head and "Twelve Apostles" ever in sight. The latter are twelve peaks of curious shape running side by side, and standing out in sharp outline

A Suburb of Cape Town.

against the brilliant sky. The slopes up to a certain height were covered with rich verdure. Ravines and precipices abounded. The calm ocean to our right stretched far as the eye could reach; dazzling and transparent, blue and green, with here and there deep streaks of purple: all flashing out a myriad gleams in the sun's reflection. Occasionally we passed a fishing settlement: a handful of houses perched upon the slopes, with an inn where one might dream away the days of a delicious summer; a primitive church with a lych gate announcing that the people are not by any means heathens in this far-away land.

In one of these silvery bays we came to an anchor: and a smile of satisfaction passed over the copper-coloured face of our native driver—given to us because he was supposed to be the best driver in Cape Town. The smile was due to the fact that he was a man of discernment, and from the size of the luncheon-basket, had a shrewd suspicion that he would come in for more than a mere remnant of the feast.

Do you remember our luncheon that day in the desert under the shadow of the Greater Petrified Desert? The wonderful day we had on those little Arabian horses? The caravan of pilgrims we met who had come from Jedda, combining business with religion, making the best of both worlds as it were, according to the laws of the far-seeing "Prophet"?

How different the scene to-day! and yet of its kind how beautiful! We were not quite isolated; signs of life were about us, if not exactly of civilisation.

Near us was a small settlement consisting of a house which was a sort of inn, in which people may find rough accommodation. It stood in a neglected bear-garden, where buckets of water reposed; and fowls fluttered in the water, and a dog or two and a cat quenched their thirst, after which it evidently served the house for domestic purposes. Of human beings one saw no sign excepting in a distant boat in the offing, where a couple of men were throwing out fishing-nets.

Near this house was a black-looking tent, exactly like one of our large English gipsy-tents, evidently the abode of some happy family. We ourselves were on the pure white sand, and the water rippled up to within forty yards of us, green, transparent and inviting. Nothing could be seen of the settlement without going round a sand-bank. Some distance up the green slopes we found a shady bower made specially for us, where we were sheltered from the burning sun. Here we encamped, and Jeremiah, our driver—who certainly was misnamed, for he could never have been given to lamentation—was proud to bring up the hamper, spread the cloth, and then, like a wise servant, return to his horses and his sands until such time as he might be called to do justice to his "reversionary interest."

We thought ourselves safe from the world. Settlement and gipsy

tent might have been a hundred miles away. The men in the offing had thrown out their nets and disappeared round the point.

But presently our privacy was suddenly intruded upon by a woman, who seemed to spring out of the earth, and came boldly begging, not for humble remnants but for a share of the feast. Also might she bring us water and boil us a kettle: though it would have puzzled an oracle to know what to do with boiling water in this heated atmosphere. Well provided with everything, we sent her away loaded with trophies. But she was an avaricious woman, for presently we found her playing her arts and wiles upon the amiable Jeremiah, and were just in time to prevent his soft heart from depriving himself of all his reversionary property to this importunate syren—whom we threatened with vengeance if she did not at once disappear for ever. She slowly departed muttering something about "hungry children, hard times, and no money." You see, human nature is the same even in the backwoods of South Africa. We came down upon Jeremiah for his generosity.

"Me know her, sir," he said. "Always see her here, always same beggar woman, always same story. Got evil eye upon her. Me fall sick no give her anything."

But he evidently believed nothing of the sort: it was only his weak good nature.

When we packed up and departed, the gipsy woman standing afar off was impudent enough to wave a handkerchief, the exact complexion of her tent, by way of farewell. Possibly it was meant for Jeremiah, but as he had no eyes in the back of his head it was love's labour lost as far as he was concerned.

Soon after this we left the magnificent sea coast and turned inland: exchanging one grandeur for another. To us it was even more striking. The beautiful sea is more or less the same everywhere, but we were now sweeping amidst gigantic hills and valleys overwhelming in their extent and magnificence.

The mountain tops were wild and barren, but lower down vegetation was luxuriant. These valleys are some of the most fertile in all South Africa, and yield some of the best fruit. We passed many a rich and cultivated orchard, and every now and then came to a lonely farm-house reposing amidst all this wild wealth of Nature, where life, whatever its inmates may think, is a paradise. Probably to them its beauty lies in the abundant fertility of its ground—only another emblem of paradise. Those Boers to whom we spoke were quiet and friendly, and if we had proposed putting up in any one of them, I think we should have found a welcome.

Hills and outlines were wonderfully fine and apparently unending. Trees and shrubs flourished in abundance, amidst a profusion of undergrowth; and the silver tree was very conspicuous. We had never seen one before, and were much struck with its beauty. The tree is not large, but it is quite different from any other. Its leaves

shine out like silver, and when closely examined look like the softest and most brilliant silk plush: thin pointed leaves of delicate shape.

Jeremiah, seeing our admiration, stopped his chariot, which he commanded like another Cæsar, and disappearing into the plantation, brought back a trophy in the shape of an enormous branch under whose shadow we might have reposed. The effect upon the cavalcade was no doubt magnificent, but made one feel rather like tourists out for a holiday.

It would be impossible to do justice to the wonders of this drive: the variety of the hills and their ever-changing outlines as we turned to right or left: the amazing extent and breadth of the slopes, many of them purple with a lovely heather. The tone of the landscape was also exquisite, the distant hills surrounded by a purple atmosphere, whilst the clear light air was more exhilarating than champagne. We envied the few inhabitants of these matchless valleys, where every season must have its own special and perfect beauty.

Presently, after a steep ascent, we came to a spot considered to be the crowning glory of the drive. Here the mountains were wild and rocky, but far down, stretched wide plains laden with fruit-trees and vines, all the riches of the earth; and beyond all, the deep blue sea shimmered in the sunshine. We had made a complete half circle, and were now in the region of the Devil's Peak, and the other side of the water: approaching the most cultivated and richest portion of the neighbourhood: the famous vineyards of Constantia, which make the celebrated wine that goes to all parts of the world. Only this one little nook in all South Africa yields the grape necessary for the wine. A little earlier in the season we could have loaded ourselves with enormous bunches of luscious fruit, much of it with an exquisite muscatel flavour, for a very trifling consideration; but now all was over. The vineyards were empty, the wine-presses yet warm and red. Autumn was passing on to winter: the richness of the many harvests of fruit and flower and grain was past; pruning-hooks had given place to ploughshares.

Very soon we lost the fine expanse of hills and valleys, and heather breathing air, and came into regions of life and civilisation; the suburbs of Cape Town, where charming houses are surrounded by gardens full of tropical vegetation: the great mountain rising behind, and giving to this spot the temperature of Madeira—and something of its relaxing atmosphere.

For it must be admitted that the capital of South Africa is by no means its healthiest region. For health you must go into the Karroo country, whose delights can only be realised by thos who know them. Cape Town is almost on a level with the sea: but far away you may reach towns and settlements six thousand feet above it, where the bright, rarefied air often restores life and hope to the most shattered health.

We passed under trees, magnificent as those of Government Avenue, that must have been equally planted by the old Dutch settlers of long ago. There were many signs of wealth—the new-born wealth of South Africa, though Cape Town itself has been rich and prosperous from days of old. Turning out of our way into a lovely rustic lane, we called upon a friend who lived in a tiny house adorned with a mixture of English and South African trophies and reminiscences. This good Samaritan gave us tea, beyond all doubt the most delicious ever ministered by fairy fingers: and her equipage was prepared for

Old Dutch House in Victoria Drive.

unlimited supplies. Her husband had lately gone up into one of the wildest parts of the country, and with much humour she described his adventures. Robinson Crusoe at his worst was never more isolated. As he was likely to remain there for some time, she was about to join him, and the little home in which we were being so well treated would soon know her no more.

It often requires a good deal of courage to face the vicissitudes of life, which come to many out here in the form of abundant surprises; of a good deal of loneliness and solitude; of much roughing

and making the best of very hard lines. And to some women who have gone out bravely from a refined English home, where comfort and luxury come in the general ordering of things, the transition must often be trying. But a certain talisman who works wonders and gilds the roughest passages of existence, throws sunshine upon the most gloomy scenes: and for the sake of "one love in a life" women will go through a martyrdom of hardships: even enjoy them: the self-denying part of humanity, which puts to shame the sterner element.

In the neighbourhood of Cape Town, however, there are no hardships. Life passes pleasantly and luxuriously; there is plenty of society, and it is less stiff and formal than that of the mother country; though even in England stiffness and formality are becoming more and more a tradition. And Cape Town is not so very far away, so that amongst those who are able to afford the leisure and the expense, there is the excitement of an occasional visit to the old home: travelling made easy in this *Dunottar Castle* age.

It was a pleasant conclusion to a memorable day, this five o'clock tea-gathering under the shadow of Table Mountain. Jeremiah brought us back in triumph and departed a happier and a richer man: perhaps to bestow his *douceur* upon the first case of distress, real or fictitious, he might fall in with. In softness of heart he seemed nothing but a grown-up child; yet shrewd enough in his way, and certainly a famous whip.

"Take you again to-morrow, sir?" he asked anxiously, touching his cap generally. "Very happy, sir, take you other fine drive, with fine lunch-basket. Fine day certain, sir. No more bad days in Cape Town like yesterday. Weather made a mistake, sir; no more mistakes."

We would willingly have obliged him, but in the first place there were other objects in view for the morrow; and secondly, we could never again equal the drive we had just taken. It makes one's first impressions of the country in the way of scenery almost overwhelming; but from all I hear we shall see very little more that will at all come up to it in beauty and grandeur.

In summer-time when all vegetation is in full bloom: wild flowers and heather and flowering trees with all their abundant foliage; when all the vines are laden with clusters of rich fruit, that hang in luscious green and purple bunches, and are so amazingly plentiful that you may enjoy a surfeit of them for a very small coin: at such times one realises what a favoured land is South Africa; how rich in resources; what a field for industry; what a country for emigration; what a future awaits the superfluous population of other lands; what a refuge for the "unemployed" of England when the people of our little island have increased and multiplied beyond all limits, and by their wisdom have driven most of its trade and prosperity into any part of the world but its own. That day will come.

And as I looked upon those wonderfully fertile plains and valleys of the Victoria Drive it seemed to me that one of the great industries of the future in South Africa must and will be fruit-growing. This amazingly beautiful and productive land has not been given to lie fallow. The day will come when we shall see vast vineyards and orchards covering the country and flourishing like green bay trees: and those who are first in the field will reap the richest harvest. Everything is in its favour. Climate, which is a most important

On our way Home.

consideration; for many men are like trees and will not always bear transplanting. Where malaria reigns an Englishman too often falls victim to it; where brigands lurk he is sure to get into mischief, which often ends in being shot down. Many of us have had friends who have gone out to these doubtful countries, to be heard of no more; until the sickness of hope deferred has passed into the sorrow of resigned certainty.

But in South Africa there is nothing of all this; no "daylight ghosts" stalk about in search of prey. Every man may live in

health and safety, and it is very much his own fault if wealth and prosperity do not follow. Her very closeness to England, the centre of civilisation towards which the whole world still radiates, is in her favour. In these days of progress, it seems hardly too much to think that by and by vessels will make the voyage in ten days, for there is no end to man's invention. Even *your* magic will have to retire before the every-day magic of the coming world.

But all this is not quite yet. As we have said, South Africa is in its infancy. Imagine for a moment the resources of the land that has just been taken. Its possibilities are beyond all conception and calculation : riches within the earth and without : a vast garden and paradise to be developed.

As to the fruit-growing, to which I have referred, how and where could you find pleasanter occupation for those happy beings who have to work for their daily bread? It seems to me that it would simply be Arcadia, with all the certainty of a known climate. Imagine the owner of a vast plantation rising in the early morning and riding forth to survey his boundless fruit crops, giving employment to an army of happy and industrious hands. Think of the "painted skies" of sunrise, with all their glow and glory ; the delicious air which seems to breathe into one health and happiness, and "a divine contentment ;" think of the mere beauty of the scene : the fruit-laden trees, the vine-clad plains, all suggestive of prosperity and wealth at the outlay of a very moderate capital. It is almost a work in which only refined and educated men ought to embark, for only they could rightly feel and appreciate its charm. And depend upon it all this will come. One sees it as distinctly as if revealed. Probably a very few years will find the country revolutionised—I had almost said idealised.

Beyond this there is the more prosy but not less tangible industry opening up the mining wealth of the country. If it has made such strides in a very few years, what will it not make in say the course of the next twenty years, fifty years? This is beyond imagination ; no one can pretend to fathom the question. Time alone will do that : and probably not years or scores of years, but centuries. If in primitive days the Phœnicians came over to our little island and opened up tin mines which are still working, what is not possible, and what may not be expected from so vast a country as South Africa?

One becomes lost in dreams and speculations of an unparalleled future, and results that are limitless. Here at last we find the country of Aladdin, without the aid of his lamp. Down below are rich gardens in which grow trees with jewels for fruit—just as Aladdin saw them. We have only to pluck and enjoy the harvests that have been waiting there for untold ages : riches to which King Solomon's mines were as nothing.

And what we now know and see is probably nothing to that which shall be. From the Creation of the world, Africa—whether North South, East or West, it matters not—seems to have been a country marked out for special favour and prosperity: all the gorgeousness and pageantry of the East, corresponding to the wealth of nations which flowed into it, from the days of Mene the Egyptian monarch and the mighty Pharaohs—to take only that one little section of the great continent—down to the comparatively recent times of the Mamelukes and their betrayers: and who shall say that Southern Africa is not destined to be greater and richer than any portion of Africa, or any time, that has gone before? A few realise what South Africa is capable of: many have confidence in her future; but no one really conceives how great that future will become. It has suddenly opened up and developed, making gigantic strides in an incredibly short time; and these wonderful possibilities have not been given, or these discoveries made, merely to lead to the Dead Sea fruit of disappointment. This has not been one's experience of the government and development of the world in the past, and, like the learned Dr. Butler, we may all judge by analogy.

I have alluded to things on the earth and things under the earth, but that night, after our wonderful drive, we were favoured with a contemplation of things above the earth.

We paid a visit to the world-famed Observatory which lies in a suburb of Cape Town. There, for an hour or two, all its resources were placed at our disposal; and we saw and heard much that we had never seen or heard before. With the help of their splendid appliances, new worlds passed before us. We seemed to come into touch with the far-off firmament. Mars just then was bright and beautiful; our minds reverted to the correspondence that had filled the papers and occupied men's thoughts. We looked for a signal flash, but it came not; we tried the effect of thought transference, but the planet would not respond; perhaps it was too distant: perhaps, in spite of Goethe, mind does not influence mind unconsciously. For a time we were above the world, soaring, whether in the body or out of the body I hardly know, into unknown regions of eternal space. Stars and constellations moved before us; the grandest train, the most majestic procession ever seen. As we gazed we held our breath, as in presence of the everlasting mysteries of creation; at the very threshold of that Heaven of Heavens wherein dwelleth Righteousness. A little more and we should penetrate beyond the veil; the heavens would open to the glories of the Unseen. But they did not. It was good for us that all longing and aspiration should be unsatisfied. We had no right to ask for a sign; and the great curtain of the sky remained impenetrable. We listened for the music of the spheres but we did not hear it. Eternal silence, space, darkness; nothing more.

Yet when all passed away and we came back to earth, our eyes

were dazzled for a moment, as by a light celestial; we felt that we had touched the very fringe of the Borderland; and we had heard floating through space, how or where we know not, words written of old: He knoweth the number of the stars, and telleth them all by their names: The heavens and the earth are full of His Glory: He saw everything that He had made and behold it was very good.

I DO NOT LOVE.

I do not love, yet there are days
When, if I hear a footstep come,
My heart will beat;
When with bent ear and dreamy gaze,
For what I know not, nor for whom,
I sit and wait.

I do not love, but there are nights
When my soul melts in thoughts so sweet
I cannot sleep;
When my heart throngs with vague delights,
That with vague sorrows blend and meet,
Until I weep.

I do not love, but morns there are
That in my soul a sunshine make,
And seem to say,
Thy life will boast another star,
A loved and unknown voice shall wake
Thy heart to-day.

Alas! that blest mood may not last,
Though step should come I heed it not;
Cold grows my heart.
Love, dost thou come and go so fast?
And art thou, love, as soon forgot,
As cold depart?

JULIA KAVANAGH.

THE SKIPPER'S TREASURE.

THIS is my best—in fact, my only story of personal adventure, and I have felt it somewhat of a hardship not to be allowed to tell it sooner; but, as the reader will observe, I am not the sole proprietor. There is another man concerned, and it is in deference to his feelings that I have kept it to myself so long, that I almost fear some of the flavour may have gone off in the keeping.

For instance, how in these later days: when the swarming cyclist covers the length and breadth of a country or so in a Bank holiday run; when for his use and behoof this little island of ours has been surveyed, and measured, and mapped, till every square inch has been accounted for: how can I make any one enter into the spirit of wild adventure that nerved me, a City clerk, to start on a fortnight's walking tour through a little known region of England (precise locality suppressed by desire of the other man)—how can I make it seem possible to get lost as I was lost, or to find what I found?

I can but try.

The losing was a simple business. A dusty highroad crowded with flocks of sheep on their way to the market town; a tempting, bowery, grass-grown bye-lane; a flagrant misdirection by a civil-spoken rustic impostor; and a mile or two of tramp, ending on the open down, with a sea-mist rising and thickening every minute;—there you have it.

"The road must lead to somewhere," said I, and tramped on.

It did. To a cluster of deserted, insolvent-looking farm-buildings, with tumbledown stables and sheds plastered over with auctioneer's bills about "Live and dead stock," to be sold on some long past day.

Then the road became a cart-track, and the cart-track stopped at a gate and went on as a footpath; while all the time the down rose higher and higher, the white mist drifted and curled round me, and the sound of the sea grew nearer and nearer.

I blundered off the path, and on to a sheep-track, somehow, and then stuck to that in sheer despair of doing anything else; in my cockney ignorance imagining that a sheep-track must necessarily end in something—a farm, a shepherd's hut may be, or perhaps only a trough or a turnip-cutter. So I stumbled blindly forward till a sudden gust of wind from the sea swept up and eddied round me, tearing the mist-shroud into tatters and driving it landwards, and I stopped short with a catch in my breath, and a sickening qualm, within two steps of sudden death.

The cliff edge was within a few inches of me, and St. Barr's church and village a hundred feet below.

The down was cloven by a mighty gash, the sea-level reaching far inland. As I stood, giddy and breathless, the fresh wind from the

sea blew in my face, and steadied my nerves, and the last rag of mist floated melting away from beneath me. I made out first a little grey church with a ruined tower standing on the opposite side of the cleft under the shelter of the cliff; then a tiny bay with a beach of yellow shingle, a cluster of fishermen's huts, boats drawn up near a rough wooden pier, and immediately below me more cottages with lights twinkling in their windows; for, though I stood in the yellow glow of evening, day was already done in the depths below.

This brought home to me the consideration of what was to be done next.

What choice had I? To turn back? Too disgusting an idea to entertain for a moment. To the left? Over the cliff edge into the sea. To the right? Inland over the down, where I might strike the lost high-road—or I might not: a much stronger probability. Straight forward? Well, why not?

I crept cautiously to the edge and peered over. A narrow path zigzagged up the face of the cliff to within about forty feet of the top, broken off apparently by some landslip. At one point some well-established gorse bushes seemed to offer assistance. Still it was an ugly descent. The light was waning, the footing insecure; a clod of earth which I touched with my stick went crashing down into the darkness with a cataract of earth and stones following it. The longer I looked at the job the less I liked it; so I looked no longer, but, as the sun was setting with inconvenient rapidity, over I went while light remained to me.

I reached the bottom at last with scratched hands and face and a torn coat, and found that the last turn of the path had brought me out on the beach. The fishermen's huts seemed deserted, so I ploughed my way through the shingle across to the old church.

It stood almost on the level of the shore, grey, ruined and weather-beaten, with scanty trails of ivy drooping in tangles round it, looking like a sea-weed-draped boulder rather bigger than the rest. Its low tumbledown wall was still of service to its parishioners as a popular lounge. About a score of blue-jerseyed figures were leaning up against it, or perched on the top, smoking, looking out to sea, or exchanging brief remarks on me and my movements. They were a fine-looking set of fellows, with a strong family likeness amongst them. They represented the entire able-bodied male population of the place, and were all, as I afterwards discovered, near relations.

I accosted the nearest, and all the rest drifted up and stood around, gravely staring at me with an air of amiable mistrust. I was evidently a novelty, and perhaps not a satisfactory one. When I asked a question, one looked at another with slow interrogation, and the answer came in a soft drawl from anybody but the one I addressed. "What was the name of this place?" "St. Barr's, for shew-er." "Where was the nearest town?" "Why, Starmouth, over yonder." "How could I get there?" I learnt that Ben Kimber's boat might or

mightn't be going round to-morrow, and Ben might or mightn't give me a passage—they are a cautious folk in St. Barr's. "Was there a road?" This was a poser. After much searching of mind and head-shaking and private discussion as to where the carrier due on Tuesday week was likely to hail from, my new acquaintances gave up the problem. "Was there any inn at which I could get supper and bed?" "There was the Hand and Heart." And with one accord the whole assembly put itself in motion to show me the way to it.

The whole assembly, with one exception.

One man alone had paid no attention to me, but had sat on the wall stolidly smoking, his elbows on his knees, his chin in his hands, and his hat pulled well down over his nose. His indifference drew my attention to him, or perhaps it was the whiff of tobacco I caught in passing—uncommonly good stuff for a St. Barr's fisherman to smoke. Anyhow I stared hard into his face, and caught a look that made me start and go on my way deeply exercised by what I had seen.

It was the other man, as you guess of course.

The Hand and Heart was not in the habit of receiving guests for the night, but promised to see what it could do for me. It was too dark to explore the village while my supper was being prepared, so I made my way back to the beach, where with much shouting and hauling and grinding of shingle the boats were going out, carrying every man in the place with them out a-fishing.

Again, with one exception. I didn't see the other man amongst them.

After a supper of fried fish and pickled pork, I was shown my room: a sort of back kitchen with a newly-scoured brick floor and a door opening out on the road. Strings of onions, dried fish, and odds and ends of household gear hung from the rafters; there was a heap of nets at one end, and the pickled pork had come out of a barrel in the corner.

However, the truckle-bed with its patchwork counterpane was clean, a glorious fire of drift-wood was drying up the floor, and provision for the night's requirements stood on the table in the shape of a spirit bottle and tumbler, while a big kettle sang on the hob. I shut myself in, well content, filled and lighted my pipe, and settled down for a quiet half-hour over the fire before turning in.

I was roused by a tapping on the window, soft but imperative.

I pushed aside the checked curtain and saw in the bright moonlight that my visitor was the other man, my partner in this story, to whom for convenience sake I must now put a name.

He was Mr. Marcus Goring, a gentleman whom I had many a time ushered deferentially in or out of the private office at our place in the City, and whom I, with the rest of the clerks, regarded with much respect and admiration. The respect was for his position as the nephew of a big firm with whom we did considerable business, the admiration was for his manner, his air, the cut of his clothes, which seemed to bring a perfume of the West End amongst us

But that was in the City. Mr. Marcus Goring, as he appeared that night when I noiselessly unbolted the door in response to his signal, and he slouched in in his big fisherman's boots with a sou'wester over his eyes and a stubbly-bearded chin, did not command admiration; and I forgot to be deferential either, and saluted him with "Hullo, what's up?"

"Good evening, Heritage," he said in his customary off-hand condescending tone, that went very well with a tall hat and a gardenia in his button-hole, but was out of place in my back-kitchen, I felt. "You recognised me just now I saw, but you kept it to yourself."

"It was none of my business," I answered indifferently; "you need not be afraid I shall mention it at the office. Won't you sit down?"

"I was rather disgusted to see you dropping from the skies into the midst of us, do you know?" he went on smiling affably. "But I begin to think we may make the meeting profitable. How long can you stay?"

"Till I can find my way out to-morrow."

"Leave's up, eh?"

"It will be by the time I get back to town."

"Telegraph for extension. Mention my name."

"Thanks, I'd rather not. It wouldn't suit my engagements. It's not every day that a poor little clerk gets a chance of a bit of swagger." He looked infinitely astonished, then he laughed.

"I suppose you have some doubts about my business here. My appearance is not calculated to inspire confidence I admit." He stretched out a dingy blue leg and looked at it consideringly. "I'm here on a queer errand. I wonder if I can trust you?"

"I wouldn't if I were you," I answered him. "Personally, I should much prefer that you did not."

"But I must. I want you to help me, don't you see. If you had been decently obliging in the first instance, I needn't have let you know more than I chose. As it is——"

I pushed the whiskey over to him and composed myself to listen. He mixed and meditated a bit, and at last started off.

"There was an old, old nurse about my father's house when I was a boy, who had come into our family somewhere towards the beginning of this century. Molly Kimber was a St. Barr's woman—everyone is a Kimber here who isn't a Guest. It must be more than twenty years since she died—I know I connect her funeral with my first home-coming from Harrow, but when I think of her it seems only the other day that I was sitting on the table in her room threading her needles for her—she was a valiant needlewoman—and rummaging out her work-box; or having tea with lots of hot buttered toast and plum jam while she told me stories of her young days here. Rattling good stories they were too, with a fine sea flavour about them, full of smuggling and scrimmages with coastguards and alarms of French invasion. But the best one of all was about Miss Juliana. I asked for that one over and over again."

I supposed that "the bearing of these observations lay in their application," and waited for enlightenment.

"I was madly in love with Miss Juliana. There was a little water-colour sketch of her in the pocket of the work-box, and I used to gaze fondly on it while Molly discoursed of all the beautiful young creature's charms and accomplishments; how she used to play the harp and guitar, and do tambour-work and make bead-purses and hair-chains, and paint flowers and butterflies on rice paper. Molly had treasured specimens of all these elegant industries except the last, which the mice had got at. She could also dance the shawl dance, and repeat pages and pages of beautiful poetry by heart. Her father was the parson here. I am lodging now in what was the Parsonage, and can show you the very walk where my Juliana wandered in a puce satin gown, with oh, such tiny sandalled shoes, and hair in graceful drooping curls.

"Her head had a graceful droop likewise, and so had the flowers in her slim fingers. The picture hangs framed in my room at home now, and I've looked at it for all these years, never guessing how some day the ghost of pretty Juliana would lure me to the very spot where she lies buried——"

"I see! Going to put her into a novel, and have come down to get up the local colouring."

"Wrong. The idea isn't half a bad one, though. There's splendid material lying ready to hand. Pretty Miss Juliana, with all her boarding-school graces, brought home here to the rough, rollicking, deep-drinking society of St. Barr's in its prosperous days. Those began and ended with the war with France. St. Barr was marked by nature for the headquarters of the 'fair trade.' Look at the bay full of shoals and shallows only known to the fishermen, the narrow road inland which a couple of men could make impassable at an hour's notice, the long stretch of unguarded coast to east and west. The St. Barr's men did a roaring traffic, Molly said; not a wife but had her French silk gown and lace cap; and brandy and guineas were plentiful with the husbands. They had a fine fleet of boats, and a perfect system of signalling—that old iron crow's nest on the church tower had its uses then, and the vaults under the chancel held more than coffins. If you go to Starmouth by road you'll see many a fine farmhouse where carts and horses were always in readiness when the word was given from St. Barr's, and where bales of silk and tobacco have been built up in the hayricks on occasion. I'm afraid Miss Juliana's father was no better than his neighbours—a ne'er-do-weel, pitchforked into the family living as the one place where he could do least mischief. Juliana must have been a girl of spirit, for she kept him sober till service was over on Sundays, wrote his sermons, and even got up a class for reading, writing, and Scripture in the Parsonage kitchen. Molly was one of the prize scholars apparently. Some of the lads used to come just to plague the girls and make a riot, but Dick Lee broke two of their heads and came himself regular to make the others behave."

"Dick Lee is the hero, I presume?"

"Just so. He is neither Guest nor Kimber, you observe, but a foreigner like ourselves. He came into the village, as you did, over the cliff. After a wild night of sleet and snow a gipsy woman was found dead at the foot of the path you came down, half buried in a drift, with a little brown baby rolled up in her red shawl. Molly doesn't know how they arrived at his name—it happened before her time. He grew up in St. Barr's as any little stray pup might have done, getting a kick here and a scrap there, and thriving on the treatment. He was a strong, daring young scamp, the head of all the mischief in the place, till Miss Juliana came home, when he suddenly sobered down to the amazement of all his old comrades, groomed the Vicar's pony, dug the Vicarage garden, kept the kitchen supplied with the best fish of the catch, not to speak of a chance hare now and then or a brace of birds—for Dick was a born poacher—and came to church for three Sundays running with a clean face and a new orange kerchief tied round his neck.

"St. Barr's jeered and jested. Dick defied St. Barr's and stuck to the Sunday school.

"A greater disturbance than usual took place there one day when Ikey Guest, three years older and two stone heavier than Dick, so mauled and maltreated him that the Vicar had to interfere and order both off the premises. Ikey wouldn't budge, but Dick, wiping his injured face, stood up and swore a mighty oath he would never show his face again in St. Barr's till he could come back, with gold lace on his coat and a sword by his side, and marry Miss Juliana! He caught her in his arms, as she stood aghast, snatched a kiss and dashed off into the night. They found afterwards that he had broken into the church and stolen her prayer-book from the Vicarage pew, and they heard of him as being seen at Starmouth on board a man-of-war sailing for the West Indies, and that was all."

"End of Vol. 1," I observed, as Goring stopped to relight his pipe.

"Just so. Now you won't believe what I'm going to tell you, that five or six years after Dick Lee did come back again. St. Barr's awoke one morning to find a schooner at anchor in the bay. In the course of the morning a boat was put off from her and came alongside the pier, and Dick Lee himself stepped ashore in a uniform as smart as gold lace could make it, a cocked hat, and a sword by his side. He swaggered up the village street followed by his boat's crew, looking for all the world like a king coming back to his own country. All the place turned out to welcome him, but he spoke sharp and high, tossed a handful of money to the children who crowded round, and made straight for the Vicarage.

"Molly was Miss Juliana's little maid by this time, learning to dress hair, darn and patch and wait at table; so when Dick was actually asked to dine with the Vicar, you may guess she kept her ears

open. He told wonderful stories of his adventures—speaking quite like a gentleman and talking about the ship as his own and of the prizes she had won. After dinner he and the Vicar sat smoking their pipes together till nearly dusk, and then he went away.

"My word, but Miss Juliana was in a fine flutter that evening when Molly came to brush and curl her hair for the night! He had really come back to marry her, and was to come to-morrow for her father's answer. She sat looking at his ship in the moonlight and said long pieces of poetry to Molly about a 'Corsair' and his bride, but when Molly asked if that were Dick Lee's profession, she sighed and said 'Alas, no!' He was but the owner of a merchantman, carrying 'Letters of marque'—but it strikes me that Molly's guess was not such a bad one. Professions get mixed in war-time.

"Captain Lee came next evening to supper. He brought a sack full of presents with him. Molly talked of golden bowls and flagons, chains and candlesticks, strings of pearls and diamond earrings. She had her share, a necklace of beautifully carved black wood beads alternating with chased gold ones—I think it must have been a rosary—a Spanish lace veil, and sundry odds and ends.

"Miss Juliana sang and played the harp to her corsair after supper, blushing as red as a rose while he leaned over her chair and made hot love to her, the Vicar feebly protesting.

"At last it was settled that they were actually to be married at the New Year. Molly watched him saying 'good-bye' to them in the porch. He kissed Miss Juliana again and again. 'I'll be here on Christmas Day, my darling, dead or alive,' he said. Then he shook the Vicar's hand: 'Good-bye, father-in-law; I'll keep my word. My sea-chest shall come back full of golden guineas; you shall count them yourself.' He ran back for one more kiss of his sweetheart, then away he sailed.

"You're getting sleepy I see, but Vol. 3 is a very short one.

"He *did* come back. He *did* bring home the big sea-chest full of gold, but he never saw poor Miss Juliana again. She died of fever after a short illness, and was buried in the Vicarage vault under the chancel. I can show you the very place.

"Christmas Day came and went, and Molly was abed and asleep, when a knocking at the door roused her. Peeping over the landing-rail into the hall, she could see the Vicar admitting a tall figure wrapped in a great cloak, under which she could spy a sword and a gold-trimmed cuff. He went into the Vicar's study, and they talked long together. Outside in the garden Molly could see six sailors standing round something like a great chest covered with a tarpaulin. Presently the Vicar and his visitor came out, both apparently overwhelmed with grief. Some order was given to the sailors who took up the chest and all the party disappeared in the direction of the church. Molly dressed as fast as she could and ran out after them, following the track of their footsteps in the snow. She came

upon one of the men standing on the look-out at the churchyard gate, and dived behind a snow-covered bush to wait events. After a long time a soft whistle was given, and Molly heard the crackle of the man's footsteps on the snow. She crept out and saw the whole party turning the far corner of the church, taking the short-cut to the sea. She scrambled on the churchyard wall to look after them, and saw distinctly that they had *not* the chest with them. Then the Vicar came upon her suddenly and she fled home. The ship sailed in the night and was never seen in St. Barr's again."

"Is that the end?"

"That is all the end Molly Kimber ever knew."

"What became of the Vicar?"

"He started for Starmouth next morning, taking the key of the vault with him. Ike Guest's old boat was found bottom upwards on the beach some time after, but none of those who started in her were ever seen again. Molly sickened for the fever next day, and was raving with delirium for many days. Her mother hurried her away from St. Barr's as soon as she got better. The fever ravaged the place like a pestilence, and years after, when Molly went back there, she found all her old friends and relations dead and gone—even Miss Juliana's name and story clean forgotten. Nor could she discover whether any more was ever heard of Captain Lee and his sea-chest."

"Why, of course he came back one moonshiny night and carried it off, or his men did?"

"Do you think so? Well, I don't. I think the chances are that Captain Lee sailed for the Spanish Main or wherever his Tom Tiddler's ground might be. I dare say he picked up enough gold and silver to fill another sea-chest before he died."

"Suppose Molly invented the whole story of Dick Lee's return to satisfy the cravings of your infant imagination? Or more likely—dreamt it in the fever?"

"What an unbeliever you are! Well, I'll give you another bit of evidence that she did neither. Molly's stepfather sent her all that belonged to her when her mother died. Amongst them was a queer sort of broken box or case that she gave me. It knocked about in the nursery toy-cupboard for years till I reclaimed it. I often thought of showing it to some dealer in curios, but never did till last month. He offered me ten pounds down for it. It was a reliquary of gold and enamel—old Italian work—once set with precious stones.

"What do you say to that? Why shouldn't those candlesticks have been silver-gilt or gold—and the bowls and flagons, eh? They have all disappeared, but it is borne in upon me that if Dick Lee's treasure ever came here it is here still."

"Let us grant the possibility—and then?"

"Then I want you to help me to find it. It mayn't be all coin. There may be gold and silver plate, precious stones, perhaps more

church plunder—" and this respectable London citizen actually smacked his lips at the thought—" anyhow, something worth the search is to be found here. Now, what do you say?"

" I'd like a few more details of your plan for getting away with it first."

" That's simple. I'm here in the character of a mining expert sent by the Lord of the manor—whoever he may be—to prospect for copper."

" Copper! In these cliffs?"

" Copper, or lead, or water, or what you please. St. Barr's is not geological. I knock about with a sack and a hammer, splitting stones, and talk valiantly about ores and veins and the money made in mines. The boys followed me about a bit at first, but the novelty has worn off me now. I showed them some chemical experiments, and sent off a heavy chest of specimens by the carrier last Tuesday. There will be nothing singular in my asking you to take charge of another load as far as London—in fact you might come back and fetch away a second instalment if needful—you remember it took six sailors to carry the chest. What are you hesitating about? Don't you think I'll make it worth your while? I'll settle about your extra leave, and you shall have a fair percentage on the find. Can't you trust me?"

" Absolutely. But I don't want a percentage—"

" Halves, I suppose? You have me at your mercy." He looked at me more in sorrow than in anger.

" I don't want a sixpence of your treasure. Wilkinson has gone to the Liverpool office has he not?"

" What then?"

" That leaves a vacancy—"

" You won't lose anything for want of asking! Do you expect me to recommend you for Wilkinson's berth?" He surveyed me up and down. " Why not?" I heard him ask himself at last; then aloud: " I think I can promise it you. Anything else?"

" That you'll get what you want me to help in, done to-night. I must get off early to-morrow."

" That means you don't quite trust me. All right."

Of course he says now that he had his eye on me from the first, and should have offered me Wilkinson's post in any case. If so, as events turned out, I'm delighted to hear it. We shook hands on the bargain and a long talk over preliminaries followed. We had a stiff job before us, he warned me, but time enough to get through it before the boats returned. I raked out my fire and extinguished the candle, locked both doors of my room and sallied forth with him. We sneaked from shadow to shadow till we passed the last cottage, skirted some untidy little enclosures, and gained a crazy old building standing within a stone's-throw of the church smothered in overgrown shrubbery. This was the old Vicarage where he lodged with a certain deaf old Mrs. Guest, grandmother to half the parish.

He left me to fetch some needful articles from the house, and then

guided me in the darkness to what I made out to be a short avenue with stunted elms arching their boughs overhead. "Juliana's walk," he murmured with a touch of sentiment, handing me a bundle to carry.

It ended in the gate into the churchyard described in Molly's story.

The side of the church appeared a mere heap of ruins; one of the chancel walls had fallen, Goring explained, and it had cost him an infinity of trouble to discover under the débris the exact site of the vicar's family vault. Luckily the stones had so fallen as to screen but not block the entrance to the vault, which was further masked by a self-sown elder bush. Under cover of its salt-bitten leaves he had been at work clearing the passage, so that there was just space for the two of us to stand in.

We scrambled down into it with our bundles, out of one of which Goring proceeded to extract a dark lantern and light it. It threw an uncomfortable burglarious light on our operations, especially when sundry unfamiliar, wicked-looking tools came out of the same sack. However they were not needed just yet. Goring produced a bright new key from his pocket and fitted it carefully to the lock. It was well-oiled, and after one or two trials turned easily.

"That's all right. I took an impression in wax of the wards and posted it up to London," said my unblushing accomplice. "Now shove." We did shove, but the door, warped and swollen with damp, stuck fast till a little instrument was applied which opened it as easily as cracking a nut. Even then, the ground having risen inside, there was only room to screw in sideways.

The air was fresh inside, charged with nothing worse than a smell of mould and general decay. Goring held up the light, and I made out a spacious vault containing more coffins than I could count lying round on stone shelves. Rotting wood, tarnished metal plates and handles, cloth coverings fretted away by moth or time into flapping black rags which stirred softly in the draught—nothing more; yet before I had completed my survey the attractions of Wilkinson's desk began to fade out of view, and I wished sincerely I had left the opening for some other deserving junior.

Behind the door on the left side the coffins were piled high and close—the vicar's ancestors had been the great folks of St. Barr's—to the right, close to the entrance, they lay farther apart. Goring carried the lantern round trying to decipher names or dates on the plates, casting the light into every empty space. A coffin—the one last placed there—lay at our feet. It was covered with a mouldering mass that might have been flowers and rags of drapery once white, now green and dull as seaweed. It stood on the vault floor further forward then the others.

"Juliana Matilda. Aged twenty-one," he read rubbing the blackened plate with his coarse sleeve. I looked round hoping that

here our quest ended. Coffins, coffins everywhere, but no sign of a chest or anything resembling one could I see. "By Jove, Heritage! Look! It's *here!*" Goring cried, throwing himself on the coffin.

I looked, and for the first time began honestly to believe in the skipper's treasure.

The coffin stood out farther into the vault than the others, because in the space beyond it, stood something—not another coffin, but a rough wooden case with a rope round it.

We didn't speak another word, but set to work like maniacs; first, dragging poor Miss Juliana out and to one side, and then trying all we knew to drag the sea-chest—for that it most assuredly was—from the recess. The stout tarred rope held for a time, and the box ground and grated forward over the rough flagstones for a few inches, then the rope suddenly gave, and Goring rolled backwards capsizing the lantern.

What an hour it seemed before he could pick himself up and find the matches! I'm not a nervous man, but I declare while that light was re-kindling I felt queer, as I thought of all the dead folk round me. I had stumbled up against a coffin—suppose, only suppose a bony hand should clutch my ankle—ugh! how creepy about the legs the very idea made me—and what *was* that cold on my cheek? Every vampire, graveyard bogy, resurrectionist horror that I had ever heard in all my life, started up in my mind while that wretched wick was a-kindling.

At last we got to work again, and after various attempts got a sound rope round the chest, and hauled it forth clear of the shelf. A stout box, soundly made, very long in proportion to its width, bound many times round with rope which had at one time been sealed at the knots.

There was some black lettering upon it. "'R,'" Goring read excitedly, "'I,' 'C.'"

"Here's 'Lee'!" I interrupted him.

"And what's this?—'K-e-s-,' 'Kestril'!—the name of the ship, I suppose——"

"And a date——"

"Don't let's waste time. Lend a hand."

He passed a small steel crowbar to me, and we attacked the lid together. The wood was stout, the long rusty nails held firm. The perspiration streamed from our faces as we worked against time, terrified at the sound of our own movements. The lid gave at last, and up it came groaning and straining, tearing itself, splintering away from the remaining nails. Inside was a tarpaulin. Goring's sharp knife ripped it from end to end and discovered yet another cover beneath, this time of stout canvas.

"What's this?" we asked one another, as that being ripped disclosed a mass of fine shavings, or dried leaves, possibly, giving out a strong aromatic scent. Goring plunged his hand down into

them for some inches. "There's something of metal here, but I can't get it up."

I had pushed my fingers down the side of the box as far as they would go and caught at the edge of some linen stuff. I jerked it up and the shavings flew out in a cloud, blinding our eyes and setting me sneezing violently.

When I had wiped my streaming eyes I beheld Goring, with a face of horror, lifting his lantern and gazing with wild eyes into the chest. There lay before us—in his habit as he lived, cocked hat and sword by his side—Captain Richard Lee himself, preserved by some process of embalming that had turned his skin into the semblance of wrinkled parchment. His black beard and fierce moustache had a lifelike curl. His pistols were in his belt, his hands crossed on his breast. Under one hand was a folded paper, which I softly drew away. That was all we took. The belt clasp might have been of gold, and the pistols were silver mounted and curiously wrought: a diamond sparkled amongst the folds of yellow cambric round his neck, and a great emerald on his finger, but we never touched them. The stern calm face of the dead skipper held us at bay. We drew the sheet over him again, swept together the shavings as we could, and scattered them over him, and fastened up his coverings once more, feeling the while—at least I did—as if we had committed a murder and were burying the corpse.

Then when all was done we sat down on him and by the lantern's light slowly and laboriously made out the following :—

"We, Thomas Macbride first mate, Elijah Thorpe second mate, John Sprott boatswain, and Michael Mullins carpenter, all of the schooner 'Kestril,' now lying becalmed lat. 5° N.; long. 23° W., do give our solemn promise to our captain, Richard Lee, that we take the ship according to his orders whether he be living or dead without delay to St. Barr's in England, and that if he be dead we will faithfully give the messages that he charges us with to his friends there, and will bury him there in the churchyard, and this we shall do before Christmas Day. This we swear and to this we put our hands."

Then followed the signatures. The first, 'Thomas Macbride,' in a neat educated hand, the next in a rough scrawl, and the other two represented by marks. There was a further note at the bottom.

"Captain Lee died Oct. 15th. I, Thomas Macbride, now in command of the ship, having been bred to the doctor's trade, have taken measures to preserve the body and will deliver it safe according to my promise, and with it the captain's share of treasure—" The rest of the writing on which the dead hand had lain was indecipherable.

"What matter; since it was a lapsed legacy," sighed Goring. He opened his lantern and set a corner of the paper alight. It went up in a flare and he trampled the ashes to dust on the ground. We had no heart to speak more, neither then nor for many a day after, of the vanished chance, but hastened in silence to efface all marks of

disturbance, placed poor Miss Juliana beside her faithful sweetheart, made the door fast behind us, and scrambled back into the chill grey light of early dawn.

"Well, good-bye," said he abruptly, as we came in sight of the "Heart and Hand." "I shan't see you again till we meet in town. Much obliged." He paused, evidently casting about for some appropriate word to form the epitaph of our dead plans. "Of course I'm disgusted—that I don't deny. Not so much at the loss as at the confounded sentimentality of the fellow. Good night!"

AN IDYL OF EARLY SPRING.

Bonny and brisk stand the firs, pointing their brush-blunted fingers,
Still on each spear of the green pendant the mist jewel lingers:
Soft with the blue of the sky, bright with the shine and the dawning,
Shimmering moon-clouded orbs, luminant tears of the morning.

Shivers a breeze from the south, nodding the spray-laden grasses,
Tender as sigh of a maid, breathes through the coppice and passes:
Heavily swinging the boughs, shaking the rain-drops together,
Rocking each tremulous globe, loosing its magical tether.

Mellow and brown on the stones, flourish the hair-tufted mosses,
Daintily spearing the dew, flung as the greenery tosses;
Robin sits snug on a bough, cozy and brown and as mellow,
With the ripe red of his breast shading to sumptuous yellow.

Sings me a song of his own, frank as his heart, and as tender,
Brave with a hint of the spring, glad for the ultimate splendour.
"Courage!" he cries, "with the harsh, halcyon days intermingle,
Buds are aform in the wood, ferns are afresh in the dingle."

"Forward!" he cries, "let the soul, grace inarticulate borrow,
Live by the faith of to-day, grow for the hope of to-morrow."

Nina Frances Layard.

MONSEIGNEUR.

WE many of us know the Knight of Glorious Deeds which Spenser tells us of in the 'Faery Queen.' I also know a real and veritable Knight of Glorious Deeds who is still engaged following his noble quest. Sometimes I have caught the glitter of his armour through a London fog, and there are many who, besides myself, have spoken to him face to face.

In the olden days, enchanted forests and solitary glades, where gentle ladies were oppressed, and brave men overcome with guile, were his delight. Many a heart, half dead with shame and fear, has revived on seeing his "haughty helmet" shining as he came riding through the solemn aisles of branching trees. But, of late, he frequents the towns as well. Indeed, I understand, there is scarcely a city in the world, and no phase of society, in which he has not been encountered either wrestling with evil, or allaying pain, or comforting sorrow with "faire and feeling words."

He may, invariably, be recognised by the atmosphere of purity which surrounds him—the clear air of the mountain tops on which his spirit dwells. But purity with him is not synonymous with coldness. Its rarity is tempered by a subtle, penetrating kindness, as generous, as cheering as God's sunlight in a favoured land. Through loss of love, he knows the power of love; and loves more truly as the years go by. Lord of himself and his desires, he rules by serving, and bends the proudest will by following its inclination.

> "Not his the golden pen nor lip's persuasion,
> But a fine sense of right;
> And truth's directness meeting each occasion
> Straight as a line of light."

I remember very well when first his life touched mine; when he gave me, a lonely, discontented child, the motive power of action for years to come.

I was standing one afternoon, by the cross roads near Newport in the Isle of Wight, waiting for the Ventnor coach. It had been raining: but the sun had broken through the clouds, and the wild-mint in the hedgerows gave out an aromatic perfume. I never perceive the smell of mint now, without recalling the green, wet, shining hawthorns, the overhanging trees, and the tearful beauty of that English April day.

The coach drove up, it was almost filled with portly market-women and their portly baskets. The lady who had come to see me off, was seriously afraid there would be no room found for me; or, if there were a place, I should be overcome with heat if I were not near a

window, and, if indeed I were placed near an open window, was there not danger of my catching cold?

These were questions hard to decide and involving much confusion. In the midst of which, I peeped timidly round my friend, with the curiosity of an unfledged chicken, just as the perplexity was deepest and the clamour loudest, to see if younger eyes could not spy out a nook for my small person. Then, a voice said quickly, but without haste:

"If you will come up here, next me, that will be the best plan. I will look after the open window."

There are voices and voices: and some, without being beautiful, or even sweet, arrest attention and command respect. This one was very gentle, and farther softened by a faint Scotch accent, that sounded like a vague memory of peace. It was also commanding; with the calm authority of those who weigh considerations before expressing an opinion. On looking up to see from whence the voice proceeded, I perceived, at the far end of the coach, a gentleman leaning towards me. He held out his hand with a kind smile, and his grave, understanding eyes seemed to read the secret of my loneliness, and quiet its impatient pain.

With impulsive energy, I leaped on to the step, passed between the portly market-women, and in another instant was at his side.

He smiled again at my eagerness, for which I could not then account—being as a rule shy with strangers—and we speedily became close friends. He had seen me in my solitary rambles through the Landslip; had noticed me in church, he said; and he was not shocked when I confessed I found the service wearisome. His sympathy soon drew me on to own how much I longed to have a friend who would "love me *very* much"—some one "just as old as me, you know, and not even a little bit older," because I had no sister, no brothers near me, and not all the kind caresses of my grown-up relations could supply the void, which often made the brightest day seem dark to me.

He listened patiently, attentively; glancing at me quietly from time to time from under his thoughtful-looking brows; offering no remark until I had no more to tell.

"My child," he then said gently, "you will be always lonely unless you give as much as you wish to receive. That is a rule which holds good, under all circumstances, all through life. I knew a Glasgow merchant once—he is a rich man now—who began life with the capital of two halfpennies and the motto, quaintly spelt, 'He that giveth, geteth!' Acting on this advice, he halved his money with another boy, poorer than himself, and bought matches I believe with his share. He sold them at a profit. The next day he did better, and the next better still. Always working on the principle of giving away half his gains. Little by little he has reached success. He is rich and influential; has a crest on all his spoons and forks and painted on his carriage. But the legend that runs beneath it is the same which made his fortune, and it is in the same quaint, old-fashioned spelling: 'He that giveth, geteth!'"

After a moment's pause he went on :

"It applies to everything in the world : to *everything*. If you give little, whether of money, or time, or affection, you will get little in return. And unless *you* try to love some other lonely little girl, you will always be left alone yourself!"

He looked down on me to see if I had understood. Then, with a quick flash of humour, he changed the subject and carried me, in spirit, with him to the East, making me laugh with tales of personal adventure and strange experience in the Holy Land.

Alas, all too soon we arrived in Ventnor, and the coach stopped before the office in the High Street, where my new friend bade me farewell.

"Remember," he repeated, taking my willing hand in his, "he that giveth, geteth."

I nodded. And the kindest, heartiest smile broke like sunshine over his face. With a gracious salutation, that made me feel quite tall, he wished me every happiness and walked quickly away.

When I got home, I etched the motto on a slip of paper. I have it still, with many a dot and flourish ; and I tried persistently to find those other lonely girls whose joy should give me mine.

Here and there, in the course of many years, in London, Paris, Milan, surrounded by Irish bogs or Italian olives, I again caught distant glimpses of the glorious knight as he fulfilled his task of fighting evil. "Success takes time and work—time and work, and *patience*." Such was the lesson his example always preached, and my impulsive temperament marvelled at his self-restraint. During the summer of 18— our lives touched again in Switzerland.

The beauty of his character had deepened and unfolded since the day he told me stories in the Ventnor coach. I remember being particularly struck by the intense repose of his features and bearing as, one night, he stood in the full moonlight on the terrace outside the hotel. It was one of those still, quiet evenings whose supreme mystery, touching both senses and intellect, retains us motionless in reverent expectation, until the spirit "without voice or utterance," brooding in the shadowy mists that veil the valleys, in the trembling moonlight on the lake, in the solemn hush of the sleeping fields and cornlands, shapes an infinite thought to fit our finite understanding.

He was one with the scene—as quiet as the stately pines beyond him, as passively responsive to the hour's beauty as the shining air. All Nature seemed conscious, and he with Nature, of a pervading presence, whose loveliness, majestic purity, and tenderness was in and round, and of them too. Far in the distance, as if in a more ethereal world where neither sin nor suffering was known, the Alps rose against the sky in grave simplicity. And, as I watched him, it grew upon me ; he was indeed full of rest, a rest springing from the assurance of power more than mortal. Through obedience he had reached the point where men are counted worthy :—

"Calm eyed to face distortion, and to sit
Transparent amidst other forms of youth,
Whose only impulse is towards God and bliss."

Gradually I perceived the appearance was reality, and that the influence he exercised over others proceeded from this alone.

In the hotel he was known as "Monseigneur," and the name suited him. For, though he showed himself a simple, kindly gentleman, unassuming, unpretending, he stood alone, one among many, either greatly loved or greatly feared. Nothing impure or false could bear the shining of his "diamond shield." Yet he was no enemy to fun or laughter. A "seemly mirth" was always pleasant in his sight.

One afternoon there came to our hotel a lady burdened with a crying child. She alighted on the gravelled sweep before the door, in the midst of fine ladies and finer gentlemen gathered there to see the diligence come in; and stood, with a great rent in her muslin gown, surrounded with odd-looking parcels, a Juno among women, with Persephone's eyes and Nerissa's hair, every inch a queen.

Next day she hired a peasant girl as nursemaid to the child, and began forthwith to lead as prettily secluded a life as you could wish to see, asking only to be left in peace to dream the days away.

For she was sorrowful and took delight in gathering up the threads of memory and weaving them into sad remembrances of the past. But there is no honey-pot in summer-time untouched by flies where flies exist. The envy her beauty roused grew stronger in proportion to the praise it was compelled to hear, and soon the "tell-tale-tit" had found a charming piece of scandal to amuse her friends.

How it arose I do not know. Presently, however, a rumour crept abroad that Mrs. Ellice had left home without her husband's consent; it was observed a famous astronomer was paying her by far too marked attention; that she encouraged him disgracefully; that she was a dreadful flirt! These whispers took time in coming round; but they did come round at last, both to the ears of Mrs. Ellice and of Monseigneur. I heard of them first from her, and saw the round tears fall from outraged womanhood, of which the angels kept account.

When the matter came before him, Monseigneur broke through his rule of silence. His calm eyes blazed, flashing contempt, his words scathed like lightning, before whose scorching heat the miserable gossips shrank in dumb dismay.

But though they dared inflict no more, the wounds their idle words had caused were not soon healed.

It might have been the Wednesday following that Mrs. Ellice sat on the terrace with the astronomer and me. Trouble had told upon her; deeper shadows lay under her gentle eyes, and the arched brows above them arched more plaintively than nature had intended; her sweet lips pressed each other till there was no room left for laughter, or trembled in the effort to conceal pain. Evidently perplexity and

doubt had done their worst to scare sleep from her pillow; and bitterness was doing much the same to spoil her peace of mind.

How still it was! Soft, white clouds were clinging to the mountains opposite beyond the lake. The *tap, tap, tap* of the woodpecker came to us distinctly through the summer air. The breeze was sighing through the pine tops like a far-off echo of a distant surf. Monseigneur was pacing up and down the lawn, talking to a flock of children, telling them fairy stories probably, keeping them hanging on his words as if their lives depended on the next. And the little creatures loved him! They clung to his hands and coat-tails unforbidden; they waltzed round him, and walked backwards before him, and stared into his face with happy wonder, as if they read the secret of his eloquence behind his serious self-control, and knew what a very beautiful secret it was. Presently he came towards us followed by the children, on his way indoors, and as he passed the astronomer stood up and saluted him.

"How respectful," said Mrs. Ellice, approvingly. "I didn't know you possessed the virtue."

He glanced at her in surprise.

"Veneration, certainly, is not a strong point of mine," he said. "But I hope I can respect a good man when I see him."

Mrs. Ellice smiled wistfully. The astronomer resumed his seat. He glanced at her again doubtfully.

"I suppose I owe Monseigneur as great a debt as it is possible for one human being to owe another," he resumed. "He about saved me from ruin. . . Would you care to hear about it?" he asked, shyly.

Mrs. Ellice would; so would I. The astronomer asked permission to smoke a cigar; and, having received it, lighted one and commenced:

"A long time ago, when I was very young and green, I was at Nice taking observations—my first appointment of any importance. I had with me a large sum of money to defray all necessary expenses, for which, of course, I was accountable. My position altogether was one of tolerable responsibility for so young a man. I was proud of it, and of myself, and worked hard for several months to gain credit. I did not see much of the people with me in the hotel. Indeed, with the exception of Monseigneur and a Russian baron, they were not an interesting set. Monseigneur was very ill. I saw more of the Russian, who was a very fascinating companion. He had an immense fund of information, miscellaneous, accurate so far as it went, and would propound original hypotheses, sometimes, which we would discuss and argue about of an evening in his room or in mine. I am convinced he would have made no small name for himself in the scientific world, if he had not been hampered with too much money, and if he had not been an inveterate gambler. Monte Carlo, Monte Carlo; sooner or later, our conversation turned always on that *Paradiso*

d'Inferno. I used to wonder at the fascination the very name possessed for him. He often pressed me to go with him, but my work kept me at Nice. I had not time to make excursions even of a more innocent character."

He hesitated a moment; then continued more slowly:

"I ought to tell you, perhaps, that my mother, and also a younger brother, were dependent on me for support. So, you see, there were many reasons, beside my own ambition, why I should avoid the tables. Nor at first had I any temptation to frequent them. My contempt for all slaves of passion was very great. The accounts of suicide, recurring through the season, only awoke in me profound disgust. But, one day, I received bad news from home. Money was needed at once, to avoid serious disgrace. I had only a few napoleons in my purse, with the exception of the gold in my charge, which it would be robbery to touch; I could not command a farthing more. I was at my wits' end. I racked my brains to no purpose, and grew more miserable every moment. Ruin stared me in the face either way: if I took what did not belong to me, or if I failed to meet a certain demand within a given time. Monseigneur sat opposite me at *table d'hôte;* the baron next me. As luck would have it, the latter returned that evening from Monte Carlo, the winner of several thousand francs. He was going back next day, he said, to break the bank; and, tapping my shoulders gaily, he added:

"Don't you envy me, my boy? Wouldn't you like to have a little of the *chink, chink, chink?*"

He prided himself on his English slang.

"I would," I answered, shortly. "I've half a mind to go with you to-morrow."

"Don't have half a mind," said the baron. "Never do things by halves. Have a whole one. Come with me, and make your fortune."

The colour rose darkly to our friend's forehead as he proceeded:

"Think of me as badly as you will," he said, with an effort; "I went; taking with me five hundred francs of the money I had in trust: intending to replace it immediately on my return. For my mother's sake, I told myself, I went; and lost every sou!"

We were silent. A tear fell into Mrs. Ellice's lap.

"I was nearly out of my mind," he went on, hurriedly. "When we came back, I drank a good deal of wine at dinner, and hated Monseigneur, who, I fancied, knew all about my folly from beginning to end. He knew me at home, you see. I hated him cordially; all the more because I had resolved to retrieve my luck next day, and persuaded myself he knew my plan. Perhaps he did.

"I stayed late in the Russian's room that night, to keep myself from thinking. It was past midnight when I went to my own. But what my astonishment and disgust was, you may guess, when I found Monseigneur awaiting me there. He was weak and weary, he had

to steady himself by the chair from which he courteously arose, as I entered, to apologise for his presence at that late hour—which he did with that rare grace of his.

"What did he say? I can't tell you exactly. I know I behaved badly—did not even ask him to be seated. I stormed at him when he explained his object in coming; and he listened patiently. When I had finished my tirade, he began to speak again quietly, even humbly; but with the power of compelling attention he exercises at will. He told me he was afraid I was deeply in trouble, and that I was about to try retrieving my fortune at Monte Carlo—he begged pardon if he were mistaken—perhaps I had already lost more than I could well afford. He pointed out the inevitable result of such a course; he pleaded with me for my mother's sake, holding up before me the ruin awaiting me if I yielded to temptation. He can be marvellously eloquent at times. He would have succeeded sooner if....if I had not taken the money.

"'If I don't go, I am ruined!' I confessed, at last.

"He drew the truth from me then. And then he said, with infinite tenderness: 'Poor boy!' That was all. It upset me. I cried like a child.

"You want to know what he did? He persuaded me to leave Nice—my work was finished—and return to England by the mid-day mail. 'We must avoid all *occasion* to sin!' he said. Out of his own pocket he replaced the money I had stolen. More, he wrote a letter which relieved me, to a great degree, of the trouble threatening me. And, he lent me enough to pay my journey home. Then—well—then, he went back to his own apartment to suffer at death's door, from the effects of the excitement and over-fatigue which my rescue involved. Respect him? I should, seeing he saved me, humanly speaking, from dishonour in this world, and ruin in the next!"

"I wish he could save me!" said Mrs. Ellice.

The astronomer got up and turned away his head.

"If I were in any difficulty," he said, in the sullen tone a man's voice takes when he is strongly moved, there is no one whose advice I would sooner ask, or follow, than Monseigneur's."

She made no answer; her hands worked nervously. Presently, she too rose; and we watched her stately figure slowly moving down the terrace, across the lawn, and disappearing into the wood beyond.

"She is in great trouble," said I.

"Her husband is a brute!" returned the astronomer shortly. "And she is next door to an angel. Did you ever hear her complain? No; she never would. But I know of her sorrow from my wife."

So did I from observation.

* * * * * *

Monseigneur was going away. Monseigneur was going on Friday morning. Mrs. Ellice's perplexity deepened. All Thursday she was seen pacing the terrace, or the paths under the pines, as restlessly as

a restless spirit. She seemed unable to be still a moment. Twice, she approached my rocking-chair, and looked down into my face appealingly. Once, her lips parted as if to make a request; but she turned away without preferring it, and recommenced her weary wandering. About four in the afternoon, Monseigneur went down the drive in a hurry. He was going to the village. He met Mrs. Ellice in one of her aimless peregrinations, and something in her expression must have struck him; for he hesitated, and paused inquiringly before her. Then the two walked slowly on together.

I breathed a sigh of relief.

The astronomer came strolling by with his alpenstock; he wanted to know if I would join a party to climb one of the higher peaks—said party to start at four A.M. I thanked him. Mrs. Ellice and Monseigneur appeared in the distance, and disappeared round a bend in the road.

"That's all right!" remarked the astronomer, contentedly. "I told him last night she wanted looking after."

"I should like to know," said I, "the secret of his influence. What is it? It is uncanny!"

A curious smile curled my friend's moustaches upward. He leaned on his alpenstock and replied slowly:

"Simply that he tries to follow in the footsteps of his divine Master. We need seek no further for a reason, I think."

* * * * * *

Next day we assembled in the hall to see Monseigneur depart. Not a few hearts were aching, knowing we should "see his face no more." He came down the stairs with the astronomer; returning the salutations and good wishes poured upon him with his peculiar courtesy and grace. Mrs. Ellice was standing near me, her restlessness gone. He stopped before her in silence, and held out his hand. She gave him hers, and they two looked at one another gravely and steadily.

"When do you start?" he said at length.

"This afternoon," she answered.

And again, that strange smile of loving approbation which had shone on me in childhood, lighted up his calm, commanding eyes, seeming to fall on her in blessing. He turned away; and a minute later, the roll of carriage-wheels announced that the Knight of Glorious Deeds had departed to pursue his quest elsewhere.

"Where are you going, after this?" I asked Mrs. Ellice.

"Home," she answered. "To my husband."

And with her queenly head erect, and her little hands pressed close together, she, too, passed out of my sight.

ELWYN KEITH.

LAST WORDS.

Now thou art here! the angel of my life,
The one dear voice from heaven,
That cheered my soul through all my hours of strife,
When hope, and joy, and light were all but riven
From me. My more than friend,
My love through all the years love has made dear!
Wait with me till the end!

I've waked from wondrous dreams; and yet, 'tis well,
For thou than sweetest dream
Art better far. And I would ever dwell
Within the glory of the tender gleam
Of those bright eyes which lend
Heaven's light to earth; and yet it cannot be!—
Wait with me till the end!

Oh, let thine eyes, my love's first, only dream,
Look kindly on me now,
And give their blessing, falling like a gleam
Of heaven upon a death-o'ershadowed brow;
A blessing that shall lend
A glory that shall light me through the gloom!
Wait with me till the end!

Thy presence lent a beauty to the flower,
A sweetness to the dove,
A charm to all the sounds of twilight's hour;
And I had all thy heart's impassioned love!
But now my soul must rend
Itself from thee, and go its lonely way!
Wait with me till the end!

I left thee on that day now long gone by,
And, while I strove for fame,
My soul fed on the love in thy fond eye,
And burned that I might gain a noble name,
And that we yet might blend
Our lives in one renown; but all is o'er!
Wait with me till the end!

Dear love! I feel thy kiss upon my brow!
Weep not, my love and life!
We'll soon together be; be near me now,
While I am passing through this mortal strife!
No other hand can tend
Me like thine own, in this, my hour of need!
Wait with me till the end!

ALEXANDER LAMONT.

He touched her fingers with his lips as respectfully as if she had been a princess.

THE ARGOSY.

MARCH, 1894.

THE GREY MONK.

By the Author of "The Mysteries of Heron Dyke."

CHAPTER IX.

ETHEL AND TAMSIN.

WHEN Ethel had read Matthew Thursby's letter to the last word she quietly refolded the paper and laid it on the table. The sisters were watching her every movement intently. She wished they would speak—that they would say something—anything. But it seemed as if they were waiting for her to break the silence. Her eyes turned from one to the other. In their faces she read nothing save love and compassion. Then, with a sob in her throat, she spoke.

"And I—the child of a stranger—a nobody's child, owe everything to you! But for you I might have starved, or found my only home in the workhouse! Oh! how can I ever love you half enough? But now I have learnt this, I feel that I have no longer a right to call this place my home. I must go out into the world and earn my living. I must strive to——"

"Ethel!" exclaimed an austere voice, that of Miss Matilda. There was an inflection in it which the girl had not heard for years—not since some juvenile peccadillo had momentarily excited the spinster's ire. "Nothing which has occurred this morning justifies you in adopting such a tone towards my sister and myself. You seem to forget that what comes as news to you has been known to us from the first. Why, then, should you assume that the mere fact of your having learnt certain things to-day for the first time should have the effect of abrogating arrangements which have been in existence for a longer period than you can remember?" Miss Matilda's style in her more didactic moments was unconsciously modelled to some extent on that of her favourite authors, the English essayists of the eighteenth century.

"Forgive me for speaking as I did," pleaded Ethel, with eyes that were blinded with tears. "But, indeed, I am so overcome by what

you have told me, and what I have just read, that I know not either what to say or what to do."

"There is nothing for you to do—nothing whatever," said Miss Matilda, still with a touch of peremptoriness.

"And perhaps, my dear, if you were to say as little as possible just now, it might be as well," interposed Miss Jane for the first time. Then turning to her sister, she added: "The poor child needs a little time to recover herself."

"There I agree with you, and I think the best thing she can do is to go and lie down for an hour." Then to Ethel, with a sudden softening of the voice, she said: "Child, child, cannot you understand that, despite all you have learnt to-day, nothing is to be changed—that you are still to be our niece, and we are still to be your aunts, and that everything is to go on precisely as before? Vale View will continue to be your home, as it has been for as long as you can remember, and you must never again hint at such a thing as going out into the world to earn your living, unless you wish your aunts to believe that you have ceased to care for them."

"And," added Miss Jane, with one of her sweetest smiles, "that you are tired of living under the same roof with two humdrum old women."

What reply Ethel would have made will never be known, because at this juncture there came a tap at the door, which was followed by the appearance of Charlotte, the parlour-maid, carrying a salver with a card on it. "If you please, ma'am," said the girl, "I've shown the lady into the morning-room."

"Tell Mrs. Lucas Dexter that I and my sister will be with her almost immediately," answered Miss Matilda, after a glance at the card.

As the girl left the room by one door, Ethel stole softly out by another.

The sisters looked at each other. It was a look which said, as plainly as words could have done, "How very fortunate that we happen to be wearing our puce lutestrings and our best caps this afternoon!"

The Hon. Mrs. Lucas Dexter was one of the great ladies of the neighbourhood, and had never condescended to call at Vale View but twice before, on both of which occasions she had contrived to extract a small cheque from the sisters. Indeed, it was a peculiarity of hers never to call upon anyone who was not quite in her own set, or whose position in the social scale, which in small provincial centres is marked by so many gradations, was admittedly below her own, without making them pay for the privilege in the shape of a subscription to one or other of the benevolent schemes in which she professed to be interested. Those among the small gentry of St. Oswyth's, and such of the professional people as were tolerably well-to-do, would have been pleased to have the Hon. Mrs. Lucas Dexter call upon them

twice as often as she did, and would have looked upon the two or three guineas of which each of her visits depleted them as money well laid out, in so far as it had been the means of securing her presence for a quarter of an hour in their drawing-rooms. But there were others, to whom every guinea was an object, who would have been glad if she had passed them by altogether, and who groaned in spirit, while smiling a sickly smile, when the inevitable tablets and pencil were produced, and Mrs. Dexter, fixing her victim through her *pince-nez*, said, with that stand-and-deliver air which few people were found bold enough to resist: "And pray, what sum shall I have the pleasure of putting down opposite *your* name?"

Although Miss Matilda had advised Ethel to go and lie down awhile, the latter had no inclination for anything of the sort. Instead, she went in search of Tamsin, and found her in her own room, an apartment situated between the dressing-rooms of the sisters, and having a door which opened into each of them. Tamsin had been on board the *Pandora*, when Ethel's supposed mother had lost her life, and had a knowledge of all the events connected with that far-off time. Ethel could talk to her and question her, as she could not talk to or question her "aunts," and there were half-a-score things she was burning to hear about.

Tamsin was sitting in her favourite spot, on the broad, low, cushioned window-seat of her room. She was crooning to herself one of the quaint hymns she had learnt at her mother's knee half a century before. She had a short, rather dumpy figure, and very homely features. Her eyes were at once shrewd and good-humoured, and she had a very pleasant smile. Her still plentiful grey hair was crowned by a plain net cap, with goffered frills, bound over the crown of the head with a broad black ribbon. In age she was some three or four years older than her mistresses, whose service she had entered soon after they left school, and with whom she had remained ever since. Tamsin was famed for her skill as a needlewoman, and this afternoon she was engaged on some fine sewing, which it was her pride to be still able to see to do without the aid of spectacles.

Ethel burst into the room, and before Tamsin knew what had happened, she found herself being violently hugged.

"I know all!" exclaimed the girl. Next moment she corrected herself. "No, not quite all, but much—a great deal. I have just been reading Uncle Matthew's letter, written a little while before he died, with directions that it should be opened by me on my nineteenth birthday. And to think that you—you dear, but artful old thing—have known all these years everything there is in the letter, and yet have never breathed the least hint that I was somebody altogether different from the Ethel Thursby I have always believed myself to be!"

"The secret was not mine, dearie," replied Tamsin, as she pulled her cap into shape. "What would my mistresses have thought, if, by as much as a single word, I had betrayed their trust in me? No, no,

it was far better for you in every way, that you should be told nothing about these things till you were grown up. You would only have kept on bothering your child's brain to no good purpose."

"But, oh! Tamsin, to think that my aunts are not my aunts, and that I have no more right to bear their name than the veriest beggar that walks the streets!" There was that in her voice which told the elder woman that her tears were very close to the surface.

"Listen, honey," said Tamsin, as she stroked the girl's brown hair fondly. And thereupon, only in different words, and homelier phraseology, she proceeded to state the case to almost the same effect that it had been stated by Miss Matilda already. The mere fact that a certain piece of information, hitherto, for wise reasons, kept from her, had been told her to-day, did not and could not in the remotest degree affect the relations which had existed for so long a time between herself and her supposed aunts. They had chosen to adopt her as their niece when she was an infant, and such she would continue to be to them so long as it should please Providence to leave unsevered the thread of their earthly existence. She, Ethel, must strive to forget that Miss Matilda and Miss Jane were not her aunts in reality, and must continue to regard them in precisely the same light that she had always done.

Ethel sat awhile in silence after Tamsin had finished speaking. Then she said: "Just now it all seems so strange and incredible to me, that I find it almost as hard to believe as I should one of the fairy tales I used to read when a girl. In time, no doubt, I shall get used to it, so that it will seem as if I must have known of it all along; but that will not be to-day, nor to-morrow." A sigh broke from her. She sat staring out of the window without seeing anything of that which her eyes rested upon.

Presently she resumed: "But now that I have been told so much, I want to know more. There are several questions, Tamsin, which I do not care to ask my aunts, but which I don't in the least mind asking you."

Tamsin screwed up her mouth, but said nothing. It altogether depended on the nature of the girl's questions whether they would be answered by her or no.

"First of all," resumed Ethel, "Uncle Matthew, in his letter, states it as his belief that the—the person who passed me off on board ship as being her child was not in reality my mother, but he omits to give any reason for such a belief. You were there. Can you tell me what his reasons were, or what was your own belief in the matter?"

Tamsin's needle stopped in the middle of a stitch. She did not reply at once, but seemed to be considering within herself in what terms she should answer the question.

"My belief was the same as Mr. Matthew's," at length she replied. "Mrs. Vane had not been two days on board before I said to myself, 'It's very strange to me if that woman is that child's mother.'

It was not merely that she didn't seem to care about you, and was never so pleased as when you were out of her sight, but from a score of different things, each a trifle in itself, that I so judged her."

"Was she—was she a lady?"

Tamsin shook her head. "She was not what *I* should call a lady, and I think I know a real lady when I see one as well as most people. She was not at all bad-looking, but as full of vanity as a peacock. Even at breakfast-time she always appeared in a silk or satin gown, with a lot of jewellery about her, which is not what ladies are in the habit of doing. Then, she used to make little slips in her talk, so that one could form a pretty good guess that her bringing up had been nothing particular. Her greatest delight was to flirt and carry on with the unmarried gentlemen on board, who used to encourage her in every way they could think of, just to make fun of her afterwards among themselves. But, with all her faults, hers was a dreadful fate—poor thing! To be laughing and giggling one minute, and playing off, as she supposed, one admirer against another, and the next to be overboard in the great black waste of waters! One wild despairing shriek came borne to our ears, and then all was silence. Oh, it was terrible!"

There was a long pause, and then Tamsin said: "I suppose, dearie, that Mr. Matthew in his letter told you about a certain person coming to the ship and inquiring for his sister, and of his recognising her in a photograph of Mrs. Vane which was shown him?"

Ethel nodded assent.

"And you would also be told how the man in question stated that his sister had gone out as lady's-maid only a little while before, that she was unmarried, and that it was impossible you should be her child?"

"Uncle Matthew's letter told me all that."

"Then, do you think, yourself, that any further evidence is needed to prove that, whoever else's daughter you may be, you are not the child of the woman who called herself Mrs. Montmorenci-Vane?"

"I suppose it must be as you say," replied Ethel. "So that the mystery of my birth remains as much a mystery as ever, and, after all these years, there is very little likelihood of its ever being solved."

"And if it has been kept from you, you may rely upon it that it has been for the best. How can you tell from what unhappiness, from what unknown dangers, you may have been saved? Instead of encouraging vain dreams about a past which is locked up from you, try to reckon up by how many blessings you are surrounded. Think what a happy girl you are, or ought to be, in comparison with what you might have been, and——"

"Oh, you dear old Tamsin, don't for one moment get it into your head that I am anything but grateful and thankful from the bottom of my heart for—for—oh, for everything!"

She had flung her arms round Tamsin's neck, and she now cried softly on her shoulder for a minute or two.

Presently she looked up with an April smile. "What a weak, foolish girl you must think me," she said. "But I have shed my last tear now for ever so long to come. I feel as if there's not another left for anybody. So, now tell me this: If nobody knows whose child I am, nor where I came from, how is it known that to-day is my nineteenth birthday?"

"That is very easily answered. It was on the 14th of November that Mrs. Vane brought you on board the *Pandora*. She told more than one person that you were just six months old, so that, if she spoke the truth, you were born sometime about the 14th of May in the same year, and that was the date which Mr. Matthew afterwards decided should be kept as your birthday."

"So that, besides so many other things, I owe my birthdays to Uncle Matthew. And what happy days they have always been! How I wish he had lived to see the child grow up on whose head he showered so many kindnesses! And now, Tamsin, the next thing I want to know is, who it was that gave me the name of Ethel."

"It was the name Mrs. Vane called you by, so, of course, there was no thought of changing it later on; but whether it was your real name, or only one the poor woman had taken a fancy to call you by, she alone could have told us. But see, there goes Mrs. Lucas Dexter's carriage! You had better run away now, honey. The bell will be almost sure to ring for me in a minute or two."

It is still the same day. The early dinner is over, and Ethel is again strolling by herself in the grounds. She feels that she wants to be alone. As yet, she can scarcely realise the news her birthday has brought her. As yet, it all seems so strange and incomprehensible. It is as if an earthquake had shaken the foundations of her life, leaving nothing stable or steadfast around her. Her aunts have said that everything is to go on as before, that not a word is to be said to any one. But one exception there must be—she must tell her lover—she must have no secrets from him. Perhaps, when he learns that she is a waif, a child of unknown parentage, and without a home other than that which charity has afforded her, he will—— But no; not even in her inmost thoughts will she so far wrong him as to deem him capable of that.

There is a hillock in the grounds, from the summit of which, a stretch of high road leading to the town is visible. More than once she climbs it to look out for her lover. At length she discerns him in the distance and her heart begins to flutter like a frightened bird in its cage. Presently she takes out her handkerchief, and waves it as a signal to him. He sees it and waves his hat in return. Then she runs down the hillock, and so times herself that at the moment he opens the side door, which admits people on foot to the grounds of Vale View, she is there to meet him.

CHAPTER X.

LAUNCE KEYMER.

LAUNCE KEYMER was a good-looking young fellow, with an insinuating manner and a plausible tongue. Being possessed of so many advantages, it was scarcely to be wondered at that he was extremely popular among the marriageable young ladies of St. Oswyth's and its neighbourhood. He was the son of a local brewer, and assisted his father in the business. He had been spoiled and indulged while young, and, as an only son, had been allowed a free rein in his extravagances. But, with a second family growing up, and an expensive wife half his own age, the elder Keymer found it a difficult matter now-a-days to meet Launce's frequent demands on his purse. In short, the only thing left for the latter to do—and it was a point as to which both father and son were in thorough accord—was to marry a girl with money.

Now, it so happened that Keymer *père* had a cousin, who was a clerk in the office of Mr. Linaway, the chief lawyer in St. Oswyth's —a man with a large family and a very limited income, whom the brewer had more than once been able to help, at little or no cost to himself. This cousin, Tuttle by name, not ungrateful for past favours, and with an eye, perhaps, to any which the future might have in store for him, and having some reason to believe that Launce was looking out for a wife with a fortune, determined to do the brewer what he termed "a good turn," in confiding to him a certain professional secret which he had learnt by accident, and of which he was supposed to be wholly ignorant.

"The very man I've been wanting to see for the last week or more," said Tuttle to the elder Keymer, next time they met. "Rather a curious thing happened to me about ten days ago, which I want to tell you about. I'll turn and walk part of the way with you, if you don't mind. Well, you must know that one forenoon I had occasion to visit the strong room which opens out of the governor's private office, in order to obtain some title-deeds which were wanted, but which I was not at once able to find, owing to their having been misplaced. While thus engaged, the governor rang his bell for Mr. Dix, the managing clerk. I suppose the old boy, who is beginning to break up, and whose memory fails him strangely at times, had quite forgotten that I was there within hearing. But be that as it may, he proceeded to give Dix instructions for the drawing up of a couple of wills, the particulars of which he was to keep strictly to himself. The wills in question were those of the two Miss Thursbys of Vale View House. The governor talks in a low voice, and mumbles a good deal, so that I was not able to catch all he said; but I picked up enough to satisfy myself that, with the exception of a few hundreds, to be distributed amongst various charities, an

annuity to an old servant, and a few minor legacies, the whole of the property of both sisters is bequeathed to the young lady known as Miss Ethel Thursby—their niece, I believe she is. Of course, I can only make a rough guess as to the value of the property in question, which seems to consist chiefly of securities of various kinds; but there's no doubt in my mind that, if realised, it would mount up to a respectable number of thousands. That being the case, Cousin Bob, it might be worth your boy's while to make up to the heiress, who is, I believe, a very pretty girl into the bargain. But not a word to a soul of what I've just told you, unless you want me to lose my berth and be ruined for life."

The hint thus afforded was too precious not to be followed up and acted upon.

Launce Keymer had already been introduced to Ethel, he having met her on two or three occasions at garden parties and other gatherings of young people. He had admired her for the time being, as he admired every pretty girl he met, and had thought no more about her. Truth to tell, Ethel was not the kind of girl to attract more than a passing glance of admiration from the brewer's son. She was too quietly dignified and "stand-offish"; she was lacking in dash and "go"; she was one of those girls whom he felt instinctively it would be unwise to talk slang to; there was something about her which, when in her company, compelled him to be upon his best behaviour; he never felt quite what he termed "at home" with her; as a consequence of which, while always smilingly polite to her, he had rather shunned than sought her society.

When the brewer had told his son that he must either change his mode of life, or marry a girl with money, the latter had pertinently asked: "Where am I to find her?" That there was an overplus of marriageable young women at St. Oswyth's, as there is in all small provincial towns, was a melancholy fact which could not be gainsaid, nor that many of them were nice girls, carefully brought up, well educated, and in every way fitted to make a reasonable man happy; but, alas! they were one and all comparatively poor. Several of them had small dowries, and would inherit something considerable at the death of their parents; but 'tis ill waiting for dead men's shoes, and Launce Keymer's needs were those of the immediate future. Meantime, while waiting for the coming heiress, he flirted to his heart's content, but, so far as was known, contrived to steer clear of any serious entanglement.

And now, lo and behold! the heiress was here—had been here, at his elbow all the time, without his having had the least suspicion of the fact.

No long time was allowed to elapse after the interview between Mr. Keymer and his cousin before Launce began to seize every opportunity that came in his way to pay assiduous court to the heiress of Vale View. There was a good deal of quiet gaiety in St. Oswyth's that

winter and spring, and they met on a number of occasions. It is not needful that we should linger over what came to pass. Launce, with a cleverness which, in a better cause, would have done him credit, did his best to adapt himself to what he called Ethel's "Quaker-like ways," toning himself down, so to speak, when in her presence, content to feel his way gradually, and not to startle her by too premature a declaration of his love, or what he wished her to regard as such. As already stated, he was both handsome and plausible. Ethel had never had such attentions paid her by any one else, and, almost before she knew what had befallen her, her heart had capitulated. When he had, as he conceived, sufficiently paved the way, Launce seized an opportunity to press his suit with well-simulated ardour, and succeeded in winning from the shrinking girl a half-reluctant consent, which, as soon as the glamour of his presence was removed, sent her to her chamber, there to shed tears which had in them a sting of poignant regret.

But she had passed her word, and she was too loyal to attempt to recall it. As the days went on, she strove to persuade herself that she had not made a mistake, but that she really did love Launce, and it may be that she gradually succeeded in hoodwinking herself into such a belief. Yet at times there was a strange aching void in her heart which puzzled and frightened her. She had always understood that when people were in love it was for them a season of unalloyed happiness; but she, alas! was far from happy.

And then there was that hateful promise which Launce had extracted from her, not to speak of their engagement to any one till he should give her leave to do so. It was only for a few weeks, he told her, probably a month at the most, that he asked her to keep unbroken silence. Private reasons of an imperative nature compelled him to ask this favour at her hands. She had yielded to his importunity, but none the less did she realise how disloyal it was on her part to have a secret—and such a secret—locked up from her aunts.

The fact was that Launce Keymer, unknown to his father, or any one at St. Oswyth's, had for some time past been making love to a pretty nursery governess at Dulminster, the county town, a dozen miles away, to which place he ran over by train on a couple of evenings in each week. Furthermore, he had been infatuated enough—and he now reviled himself in bitter terms for his folly—to write her a number of compromising letters, such as if produced in an action for breach of promise would infallibly land him in heavy damages. He knew that Hetty Blair had more than one correspondent in St. Oswyth's, and that, if the news of his engagement with Ethel Thursby were once made public, it could scarcely fail to reach her ears. Not that he would have minded that in the least, if Hetty had only burnt or otherwise destroyed those fatal letters. But, as he was well aware, she had done nothing of the kind. He had seen them with his own eyes, tied round with white ribbon, where they lay in the girl's

old-fashioned work-box which stood on the top of the bureau in her mother's little parlour, and his object was to get them back into his own hands before his engagement to Ethel got noised abroad. That once accomplished, he felt that he could afford to snap his fingers at Miss Hetty Blair.

It may seem strange that such a cool, calculating, mercenary fellow as Launce Keymer should so far have run counter to all the principles by which it was his ambition to regulate his life as to permit himself to fall in love with a young person who was compelled to work for her daily bread. But it was just one of those things which occasionally come to pass, as if to upset all one's preconceived notions of what we poor mortals think ought to happen, and to prove by what contradictory impulses hearts the most calculating and unemotional are sometimes swayed, as by a force they are powerless to resist.

Hetty Blair was a pretty brunette, with sparkling black eyes, full ripe lips, and a vivacious, not to say saucy, manner. She was genuinely in love with Keymer, and jealously miserable, although she strove to hide the fact from her lover, because for five evenings out of seven she saw nothing of him, and had no assurance that he was not making love to some one else at St. Oswyth's—which was precisely what he was doing.

Miss Blair, who at this time was filling the post of day-governess to the two young children of a major on half-pay, had her home with her mother in a little cottage in a suburb of Dulminster. Keymer was in the habit of visiting Hetty twice a week, on Wednesdays, when the girl's pupils were allowed a half-holiday, and on Saturdays, when business with the young brewer was over at an early hour; consequently, when he made an unexpected appearance at the cottage on a certain Thursday afternoon, when he was fully aware that Hetty was from home, Mrs. Blair could not refrain from expressing her surprise. His explanation was, that having to come to Dulminster on business for his father, he could not resist the temptation of arranging a little surprise for Hetty. Accordingly, he had brought her a bouquet of hothouse flowers, and one of those delicious Madeira cakes of which she was so fond, and if Mrs. Blair would so far oblige him as to step upstairs, where she kept her little cellaret, and bring down one of those half dozen of choice bottles of port he had once sent her, he should feel that his little surprise was complete.

Mrs. Blair did not object in the least. She had a weakness for port, as Launce, who was a great favourite with her, was quite aware. Accordingly she trotted slowly upstairs, for she was somewhat infirm, leaving Keymer alone, smoking his cigar in the little parlour, and he was still occupied in the same harmless fashion when she returned, ten minutes later. But in the interim he had contrived either to pick or force the lock of Hetty's work-box and obtain possession of his letters. Presently he took his leave. His father, he explained, would

expect him back by six o'clock at the latest; but of course he should see Hetty as usual on Saturday.

It was on the day prior to Ethel Thursby's birthday that Launce Keymer regained possession of his letters.

CHAPTER XI.

HOPES AND FEARS.

Launce Keymer was radiant as he opened the side door which admitted him to the grounds of Vale View. He had got back those compromising letters, which had been the bugbear of his life ever since he had won Ethel's promise to become his wife. Hetty Blair might rave and storm to her heart's content, as no doubt she would do, for she was a girl with a temper of her own, but it was no longer in her power to harm him, and beyond that he cared not at all. There was nothing now to hinder him from pressing forward his suit with Ethel, and it should be owing to no lukewarmness on his part if they were not married before the end of summer. Of course he was quite aware that the wills which the spinsters had caused to be drawn up in favour of their niece made no provision for her in the event of her marriage, and would only benefit her after the demise of one or both of them. But he had seen and heard enough of the Miss Thursbys to imbue him with a feeling of all but absolute certainty that they would not fail, on her marriage, to liberally dower the girl who was destined ultimately to succeed to the whole of their property—always provided that she married in accordance with their wishes, and he had far too good an opinion of himself to fear that his suit would meet with any discouragement at their hands. In any case, the risk of his wedding a dowerless wife was one which, in Ethel's case, Keymer was fully prepared to face; indeed, to him it seemed an almost infinitesimal one.

Master Launce gave a well-feigned start of joyful surprise when, on opening the green door, he found Ethel waiting for him just inside it, although he had quite expected to find her there. An instant later she was imprisoned in his arms, while half-a-dozen passionate kisses were imprinted in quick succession on her flaming face. One cool kiss on a coyly proffered cheek was the utmost she had ever conceded her lover before. Never had he ventured to put his arms around her till to-day. When he released her she stood panting and indignant, and half inclined to cry. But Launce only looked at her with laughing eyes.

"I could not have helped it, darling, had it been to save my life," he said. "For one thing, it is your birthday, and surely on such an occasion a lover's kisses are the sweetest congratulations he can offer. And then, again, I am the bearer of good news. The need no longer exists for keeping our engagement a secret. I am here this afternoon

to seek an interview with your aunts, and I trust that by the time we are a couple of days older all the world of St. Oswyth's will know that you and I are betrothed."

Ethel did not reply; she had not yet recovered her equanimity. They had turned, and were now sauntering slowly across the lawn. Launce's promise to at once seek an interview with her aunts had served to lift a weight off her heart, and yet she was conscious of a certain shrinking, not untinged with regret, now that the time had come when the secret of her engagement would be a secret no longer. It seemed to her as if the act of telling her aunts would serve to bind her irrevocably to a promise which till now she had felt in some vague sort of way she could have broken had she willed to do so. Now, however, that power would be lost to her for ever. For better for worse, she had accepted this man for her life partner, and she must abide by the result. She told herself that she ought to be very, very glad, and yet, somehow, there was no glow of gladness at her heart.

"I am given to understand," resumed Launce presently, "that nowadays young ladies are in the habit of looking for something on their birthdays much more substantial than mere kisses and good wishes. So, as I have no desire to be behind other people in such matters, I venture to offer this little trinket for your acceptance, in the hope that it may sometimes serve to remind you of the giver."

While speaking he had drawn from his pocket a pretty bracelet of novel design, having on it the letter 'E' formed with small diamonds and emeralds. Mr. Keymer senior had groaned in spirit while drawing the cheque to pay for it, but, for all that, he looked upon it as money well laid out. Taking Ethel's left hand in his, Launce proceeded to fix the bracelet round her wrist. Then raising his hat for a moment, he touched her fingers with his lips as respectfully as if she had been a princess. It was an effect which had been duly planned beforehand, as had also the apparently spontaneous embrace on which he had audaciously ventured at the moment of seeing her.

"It is exceedingly pretty, and you are very kind," murmured Ethel, as she let her eyes dwell for a moment on his. But, for all that, she felt as if the bracelet were a manacle.

"And now," resumed Launce, "the sooner I get over my formidable interview with your aunts, the better it will be for all concerned."

His words served like a shock to bring back to Ethel's mind all that had happened to her since the morning, which the events of the last few minutes had served temporarily to banish, and to remind her of the painful duty she had still to perform. There was no way of escape. To have married Launce without having first made known to him as much of the story of her early life as was known to herself,

would have been disloyal both to herself and him, and that was a possibility which did not find a moment's lodgment in her thoughts. All the same, the task she had set herself was none the less a hard one to fulfil.

But there was no time for hesitation. Already Launce had come to a halt. In another moment he would have turned and bent his steps towards the house. She laid a detaining hand on his sleeve. "Before you see my aunts," she said in a slightly tremulous voice, "I have something of much importance to reveal to you—something of which I myself had no knowledge till this morning."

He turned on her a quick startled look. There was something in the way she had spoken which convinced him that it was no ordinary young lady's secret—such as the confession of some prior girlish romance—that was about to be told him. It was quite out of the question that this pure-eyed, candid-browed, fair young creature could have anything to reveal which could in any way affect his suit for her hand. It might be that her conscience—and that she had a very tender conscience he did not doubt—troubled her about some trivial sin of omission, or commission, as to which she felt that she must take him into her confidence, but at which he, a man, could well afford to smile, and never give to it as much as a second thought.

The look of startled surprise merged into one of his brightest smiles. He pressed her hand as if to give her confidence. "Whatever may be the nature of what you have to tell me," he said, "you are at least assured beforehand of my sympathy, should you deem it worthy of acceptance."

She cast on him a grateful look. "Here is my favourite walk," she said. "Let us turn into it. It is the most secluded spot in the grounds, and, as a rule, the gardener and I have it all to ourselves."

It seemed as if she were pitifully desirous of delaying her revelation till the last possible moment. Now, however, she drew in her breath and took the plunge which could no longer be avoided. In brief but clear terms she proceeded to narrate to her astonished listener the details of that romantic episode of which she had been the baby heroine. She told him all as it had been told to her; she kept nothing back. Keymer listened with growing uneasiness. He had drawn one of her hands within his arm, and, as they strolled along, turning and retracing their steps from one end of the walk to the other, he pressed it gently to his side from time to time, as if to assure her that the sympathy he had promised her was hers in fullest measure.

There was a little space of silence after she had come to an end. He was turning over in his mind all that she had just told him, piecing together the different facts, and making of the narrative a connected whole. Had he formulated aloud the conclusion he presently arrived at, he would have stated it thus: "The old maids have all along been aware that the girl was no relative of theirs, and yet, with this knowledge clearly in their minds, they have chosen to

make her their heiress; consequently, the simple fact of their having told her about certain things, which had previously been kept from her of set purpose, will in no way serve to alter the disposition of their property. She will still remain their heiress, and the world at large will not know otherwise than that she is their niece. Nothing will be changed."

Launce's brain worked nimbly on occasions of emergency, and the silence had not lasted more than half a minute before he flashed on Ethel one of his most seductive smiles. "Darling," he said, in tones the tenderest at his command, "what you have now told me will only serve, if that be possible, to make you dearer to me than you were before. I assure you that I appreciate to the full the confidence thus placed in me. It proves what you may perhaps think stood in no need of proof—that you have a genuine regard for me, and unless that warmer sentiment which I trust in your case is not wholly absent be based on regard and—and on some measure of esteem, it can only be likened to one of those shallow-rooted plants which the first tempest infallibly uproots."

Launce had an excellent memory, and his last sentence had been conveyed bodily from a novel he had lately been reading. "It is just the sort of trashy aphorism that Ethel would appreciate," he had said to himself, and he had resolved to retain it in his mind till a suitable occasion should arise for making use of it. After a scarcely perceptible pause, he resumed:

"I am afraid you wronged me somewhat in your thoughts in making your confession, if I may be allowed to call it so, seem such a measure of necessity. As if any love worthy of the name could be affected, or lessened, by the fact of your being the child of unknown parents, and owing all you possess to the kindness of others in no way bound to you by the ties of kindred! I trust, for the honour of my sex, there are not many men with whom such considerations would have more weight than a grain of sand."

He spoke with so much earnestness and with such a tone of conviction, that it was impossible for Ethel not to be impressed by his words. She glanced up into his face. He was certainly very good-looking, especially just now when his features were lighted up with what seemed to her like the glow of a chivalrous and high-souled passion. She told herself that he had never been so dear to her as at that moment. She felt that she *almost* loved him.

"It was not because I distrusted your affection that I told you what I did," she said gently, "but as a simple matter of right and justice, in view of the relations that exist between us."

"In any case, we may now regard it as an incident that is over and done with. For my part, I see no need for either you or I ever to refer to it again. And now, perhaps, I may be allowed to go in search of your aunts and explain to them the errand which has brought me here."

"Yes, you have my permission to go now," answered Ethel, with a smile that was born of a blush.

They turned in the direction of the house, parting at a point where the path divided in two. Keymer took the road to the right, which would bring him out close to the main entrance of Vale View. Ethel took the one to the left, and entered the house by way of the conservatory, going straight to her own room, where she remained alone, lost in a tangled maze of thoughts in which the past, the present, and the future were inextricably mixed up, till Tamsin knocked at her door, an hour later, and brought her word that her aunts would like to see her in the drawing-room.

"And there's been a young man shut up with them for sixty minutes by the clock," added the elder woman as she glanced shrewdly at the girl. "I fancy it's young Mr. Keymer, the brewer's son. I hope he's not here on your account, honey. I had a good look at him when I took him in a cup of tea half an hour ago. (It's Charlotte's afternoon off, so I did the waiting myself.) He's fair enough to look upon, but, oh! my dearie, he's far too smooth-spoken for me—butter itself would hardly melt in his mouth: and why does he glance at you sideways out of the corners of his eyes when he thinks you're not looking? A man not to be trusted, for all his pleasant tongue. Have heed to an old woman's instinct, honey, and don't you have anything to do with him."

Ethel was too flustered to reply. She gave Tamsin a look which the latter was unable to interpret, and then ran quickly downstairs. She paused at the drawing-room door and pressed her hand to her side for a few seconds. Her heart was pulsating at railway speed. Tamsin's words rang in her ears. "A man not to be trusted." But she had trusted him and would trust him to the end! She drew herself up proudly, turned the handle of the door and went in.

It is to be borne in mind that the ladies of Vale View were already acquainted with young Keymer, they having met him at various social gatherings during the course of the last year or two. His good looks and *debonnair* manner had not failed to prepossess them in his favour, as they did nearly every one with whom he was brought in contact.

There was a small fire in the grate, for the spring evenings were still chilly, and Launce was standing by it with one elbow resting on the chimney-piece. Ethel's eyes sought his face for a moment as she entered the room. One glance at it was enough to tell her that he had won the day.

Miss Matilda rose from her chair and met Ethel half-way across the room. Taking the girl's head between her hands, she drew it forward and imprinted a tender kiss on the pure young brow.

"My love, we congratulate you," she said simply, but her voice trembled, and the smile that accompanied her words was closely allied to tears.

"Can you ever forgive me for having kept it secret from you for four whole weeks?" demanded Ethel tremulously.

"My dear," replied Miss Matilda, with a touch of stateliness, "Mr. Keymer has already been good enough to explain that it was only by his express desire you consented to do so. He had his reasons. Not a word more is needed."

CHAPTER XII.

A RECREANT LOVER.

THE day was two hours older.

Launce Keymer had not required much pressing to induce him to accept the invitation of the ladies of Vale View to join them over their early supper. The sisters had been used to early hours in their youth, and as they did not account themselves as being in any respect fashionable folk, they had seen no reason to alter their ways now they were growing old. In the dining-room the lamps were lighted and the curtains drawn. The circular table was laid out with immaculate napery and gleaming silver, with a china centre bowl heaped with some of the flowers Ethel had gathered earlier in the day, supplemented by other blooms from the conservatory. Charlotte, deftest of waiting-maids, in her neat black dress and snowy cuffs and apron, had an eye to the wants of each and all.

Keymer was in the brightest of spirits, and did not allow the talk to flag for a moment. The sisters had not laughed so much for a long time as they did over his description of a voyage in bad weather from Boulogne to Folkestone. He was a capital mimic, and the way in which he hit off the idiosyncrasies of sundry of those on board was genuinely diverting, without any trace of the vulgarity to which such a subject so readily lends itself; for Launce Keymer was clever enough to know where to draw the line in accordance with the class of company in which he happened to find himself. As for Charlotte, she was several times compelled to turn her back on the table, and even then was unable wholly to suppress the giggle with which she could not help greeting some of Mr. Keymer's sallies.

If Ethel did not laugh much, a smile was rarely long absent from her lips, while there was a sparkle in her eyes and a flush on her cheeks such as, to those who knew her well, might almost have seemed due to a touch of fever. But, if such were the case, they had their origin in a fever of the mind rather than of the body. Was she happy? She could not have told. Had the question put itself to her, she would have thrust it aside, and have resolutely refused to answer it. Self-analysis was about the last thing she would have cared to enter upon just then; indeed, she was far too healthy-minded to indulge much at any time in introspective moods and fancies. So many surprising things had happened to her in the

course of the day, that she might well be excused for feeling as if she had not yet recovered her mental equilibrium. She ate scarcely anything, and to her that scene at the supper-table was almost as unreal as some phantasmagoria, conjured up by an overwrought brain. What she needed was a long night's sleep to calm her overheated pulses, and restore the delicate balance of her nervous system which a crowd of circumstances had for the moment sufficed to disturb.

Supper was just over, but the ladies had not yet risen from the table, when Fanny, the under housemaid, entered the room with a letter which had arrived by the evening post. The letter was addressed to "The Misses Thursby," but, as a matter of course, she took it direct to Miss Matilda, as she would have taken it to Miss Jane had it not arrived till a fortnight later. Miss Matilda examined the address and post-mark through her *pince-nez*, which she did not wear habitually, but only when reading or writing.

"It bears the London post-mark," she remarked to her sister, across the table; "but the writing of the address is strange to me." Then turning to Launce, with a smile and a little bow, she said: "Have I your permission, Mr. Keymer?"

"Most certainly, my dear madam," he replied, with a grave inclination of the head. Then, while Miss Matilda was occupied with the opening and reading of her letter, he said to himself, glancing from one sister to the other: "What a couple of queer old frumps they are! They are awfully nice and good, though, far too good, not to say goody-goody, for the like of me. If I were compelled to be shut up here, I should be bored to death in a week. I suppose this place will be Ethel's, when they have gone over to the majority. Well, by that time, what's Ethel's will be mine, and it strikes me I could make myself pretty comfortable at Vale View, with a thousand, or twelve hundred a year. No, on second thoughts, I could never bear to settle down here. I should let the place and——but what's up with the old damsel? She looks as if she might be going to have a fit."

And, indeed, Miss Matilda's face, as she read the letter, had gradually faded to a dull, ashen hue.

"What is it, Mattie, dear?" demanded Miss Jane, with a gasp. It was a proof how much she was moved that she should have addressed her sister before company by the familiar name of her girlhood.

"Oh, aunty, what has happened?" broke in Ethel.

For answer Miss Matilda pushed the letter across the table to her sister. "Perhaps you had better read it for yourself," she said. Then turning to Charlotte, she added: "You can leave the room till I ring."

Miss Jane, with fingers that trembled slightly, brought her *pince-nez* into requisition and did as her sister had bidden her. "What does it mean?" she asked when she had read it through; but there

was a frightened look in her eyes which seemed to indicate that, in part at least, she guessed.

"It means ruin, sister—nothing less than ruin," replied Miss Matilda in her most solemn tones, "should what is here stated prove on further investigation to be the fact."

At the word "ruin" Keymer's marrow seemed to freeze. If the sisters were ruined, where, then, would be the fortune which Ethel was to have inherited as their heiress?

For a while no one spoke. What, indeed, was there to say? The shock was of a kind which words could do nothing to mitigate, and at no time were the sisters in the habit of giving vent to their feelings in futile exclamations. They were of the women who suffer mostly in silence.

Presently, Miss Matilda, reading in the look with which Keymer was regarding her what seemed like a note of interrogation, said to herself: "It is due to him that he should be told the particulars of our loss; for is he not now almost like one of ourselves?" With that she handed him the letter. "Oblige me by reading this, Mr. Keymer," she said. "Your doing so will save me the necessity of a long explanation."

He took the letter in silence.

Well might Miss Matilda turn pale when she read it. Briefly stated, the information it conveyed (afterwards supplemented by her for Keymer's further enlightenment) was to the following purport: The London solicitor through whom, and through whose father before him, nearly all the monetary affairs of the sisters had been managed since the time when they were quite young women, had recently died. Although Mr. Tidson's cheque for the interest due on account of the various investments he was supposed to have made on their behalf had come to hand with the utmost regularity, the securities which should have represented the investments in question were not now to be found, and there was only too much reason to fear that the dead man had surreptitiously disposed of them from time to time and applied the proceeds to his own use. The letter concluded with an intimation that the sisters should hear further from the writer in the course of a few days.

As Launce Keymer, a little later, walked homeward through the dewy night, the word *ruin* rang in his ears like a knell. Ethel Thursby (or whatever her right name was, or ought to be) was a charming girl, no one more so—although, perhaps, a trifle too demure and puritanical for his taste—and, as heiress to the spinsters, he would gladly have made her his wife. But to marry her without a shilling to call her own, either now or in time to come, was an altogether different affair.

Launce lost no time on the morrow in laying the case before his father. That astute person, having heard him quietly to the end, said: "What a very fortunate thing it is that this news has come to hand now, instead of later on. Of course the affair must not be

allowed to proceed any further till we have ascertained for a fact whether the old maids are, or are not, ruined. After all, it is just possible that the missing securities may turn up and nobody be a penny the poorer. By the way, has the girl any letters written by you in her possession?"

"Not a single line."

"So much the better. Now, what you must do is to disappear from the scene for awhile. You can run down to Cornwall and stay with your uncle for a week or two."

"But," urged Launce, "I can't, with any show of decency, leave home without either calling on, or writing to Ethel, and giving some more or less plausible excuse for my absence."

"You must neither call nor write," said his father. "You had better start by the three o'clock train this afternoon, and have your right wrist bound up as if the result of a sprain. I will make all needful excuses for you."

Launce Keymer was one of that numerous class of young men who can do with an unlimited quantity of holidays, and his father's suggestion seemed to him in every way an admirable one. Accordingly, the three o'clock train carried him away in due course, with his wrist bound up in accordance with his father's directions; but by the time St. Oswyth's had been left half-a-dozen miles behind, the bandage was unrolled and flung out of the carriage window.

In the course of the same afternoon a note, addressed to "Miss Thursby," was delivered at Vale View. In it Mr. Keymer senior begged to inform that lady, that, in consequence of his son having been called away by telegram owing to the serious illness of a near relative, he—Launce—would not be able to dine at Vale View that day, as promised. His son would himself have written had he not unfortunately happened to sprain his wrist so severely that it would be impossible for him to hold a pen for some time to come.

The note made no mention of Ethel, purposely leaving it an open question whether, before quitting home, Launce had, or had not, confided to his father the fact of his engagement.

Later in the day Mr. Keymer senior made it his business to call on his cousin, the lawyer's clerk. To him he said: "I have reason to believe that the Miss Thursbys of Vale View have lost the greater part, if not the whole, of their fortune. What I want you to do is, to keep your eyes and ears open and pick up whatever scraps of information may come in your way tending to prove either the truth or falsity of the rumour which has reached me."

The brewer argued with himself that if the news conveyed by the letter which Launce had read should prove to be correct, the sisters would go to his cousin's employer, as their local man of business, and seek his advice in the matter—which, some few days later, was precisely what they did.

(*To be continued.*)

A CENTENARIAN.

In Memoriam : Reverend John Wright. Born March 1793; died March 1893.

THERE passed away a short time ago, quietly, without any bugle note, or record in the press of the day, one who had been a very great man in his time; whose life had been spent in the busy scenes of the great world, amidst its greatest men; who had fulfilled many years of that life at Court, had been the friend of monarchs and the intimate of those who were closely allied to kings.

Had he lived a few more days, he would have closed his hundredth year: and until within a year of his death, he retained all the marvellous gifts of mind with which Nature had endowed him: all those powers which made him the Dr. Johnson of his generation, the most eloquent preacher of his day; a shining light in the Church; a deeply religious man of sound doctrine and firm principles; the truest of friends, the best and most hospitable of hosts, one of the greatest conversationalists of his time; a man overflowing with wit and humour; of profound learning; full of human sympathy and loving-kindness; who would have liked to make all men good and have all men happy.

John Wright was born in March 1793, and in March 1893 he died. Thus he passed through one of the most remarkable centuries of the world's history: a century which has probably seen more changes, more progress, than any other century since the Creation: for when its history comes to be written, the wonderful difference between that and even the eighteenth century will read as a fairy tale. Of his boyhood and youth we have nothing to record, for we know nothing about it. We first hear of him as a student of Trinity College, Cambridge, where in due time he took his degree: possibly took honours, but of this we are not certain. It goes back to somewhere about the days of the battle of Waterloo, and that is a long time ago. Undoubtedly the capacity of his mind was equal to any strain, and would answer to any pressure that might be put upon it.

In due time John Wright was ordained, and we have heard him say many a time and oft in his old age: "If I had my time to come over again, and my profession to choose, it should be the Church. It is the grandest and the most noble profession in the whole world. But if I could not have been a clergyman, then I would have been a barrister."

Happy they, who at the end of a long life look back with pleasure upon the choice of their life's work.

For some years after his ordination, Mr. Wright remained a curate,

making friends wherever he went, gaining souls by his zeal, his eloquence and his personal influence; beloved by every one with whom he came into contact.

Nothing less was possible to a man who possessed in so great a degree the divine gift of sympathy. For his tomb no more fitting inscription could be found than that "*He loved his fellow men*:" for nothing could be more true. It may safely be said that no one ever went to him for sympathy without receiving abundantly more than he expected. Himself walking uprightly, he was full of leniency and compassion for the sins and frailties and shortcomings of mankind, hating the sin, ever finding excuse for the sinner: trying to win by love, not to alienate by severity.

Of his great charm and power over people we have an example ready to hand of a singular and most interesting description. It occurred when he was still a curate, in a parish not very far from Cambridge, where many poor were to be found, who worked hard for their daily bread, and to whom shillings, to say nothing of pounds, were of consequence.

He was about to resign his curacy in favour of another, and in the parish the impression seemed to have gone forth that he was leaving because the stipend was insufficient. There was universal lamentation and mourning; he had endeared himself to all hearts, and they were unwilling to let him go.

One day a humble deputation of three women called upon him.

One was his washerwoman, the other two were women who had equally to work for their living. With tears in their eyes they had come to say they had heard he was about to leave them, and hoped he would reconsider the matter. They were told that his stipend was too small. To assist in overcoming that difficulty the laundress had come to offer to do his washing and that of his whole household for nothing, and the other two women would contribute twelve pounds a year between them out of their hard-earned substance, towards an augmentation fund, if only he would consent to remain amongst them. How deeply such a proposal and such an evidence of his power must have affected Mr. Wright we can imagine.

Surely a similar deputation never was heard of before. John Wright was ever sympathetic and warm-hearted; at all times accessible, and most especially so to the poor and suffering: and had not arrangements been finally concluded, it is probable that, whilst rejecting the proffered assistance of the good ladies, he would have yielded to their wishes, and remained to gladden and elevate the parish by his piety, his eloquence, and his earnestness.

Upon this very matter, we have before us a letter from Charles Simeon, written to Mr. Wright from King's College, Cambridge, when the century was still young. Of the influence of this great divine it is not necessary to enlarge upon here. Though he passed away two generations ago, and his personality has long been

forgotten, he is emphatically one of those men who "being dead yet speak," and he will continue to speak as long as the English Church remains. Ordinary people in these days hear that such and such a living is vested in "Simeon's Trustees," but to most it has become almost an unintelligible term. It tells them nothing of the great man who was a "Master of Israel," and whose name seventy years ago was a greater name to conjure by than perhaps the Master of Trinity himself. Certain it is that his influence has long outlived the fame of nearly all his contemporaries; and more than ever at this moment it is fighting against a movement that he would have been the first to condemn. Probably no single man has ever done more for the Established Church of England and the true reading of her Articles than Charles Simeon.

Simeon had a great regard and a very great affection for his friend John Wright. He recognised and admired his great talents, his zeal, the unrivalled eloquence of his preaching; he saw that he had strong religious convictions, and that no bribe would cause him to sin against his conscience, or swerve one hair's-breadth from his views. In short he was a man after Simeon's own heart: and greater praise than this need not be given. For with all his generosity, his self-denial and devotion to the Church, Charles Simeon was an eminently shrewd man, reading people at a glance, and seldom wrong in his estimate of them. The letter we have alluded to is too interesting not to be recorded, and runs thus :—

"My dear Sir,"—(his letters generally began "My dear Friend")

"I was sorry that I had not time to write a Testimonial for you before you set off this morning. But in my judgment formal Testimonials are of small value in comparison of *facts*. If *they* were called for, I would gladly supply them, being well qualified to do so after so many years. If I addressed myself to the few leading gentlemen whose talents are of a higher order, I would give them this simple fact, that within these three months I offered you a situation of £1000 a year, where you would have moved in the highest circles, and ministered to the most intelligent audience, and that if your wife had not dreaded a separation from her native land, you would at this moment have been upon the high seas for your destination. This to the higher classes speaks volumes.

"But Foote used to read his plays to his housekeeper, fully assured, that what pleased her, would please the whole audience. I will therefore supply a few facts for the many, and if they be duly appreciated, I have no doubt they will carry, as with a unanimous feeling, the few also; because they, whilst able to form a just estimate of higher excellences, know and feel what will prove the greatest blessing to a town like Ipswich.

"The first is that when you had served for a few Sundays a parish in this neighbourhood, in the place of a gentleman who was

about to leave it, the parishioners without ever consulting you, drew up a petition and sent it to the vicar that you might be appointed to that post, and to that post you are appointed.

"The second fact I have heard by chance within these few days. It is this—you are serving a church which at Michaelmas you will leave. But so anxious are the poor to have you, that two *poor* women, imagining that the smallness of your salary was the occasion of your leaving them, came and pledged themselves to contribute £12 a year in order to augment it; and a third poor woman, a washer-woman, offered to wash for you and for your family, *gratis*.

"What can I add to this? If the other spoke *Volumes* to *the ew*, this speaks *Libraries* to *the many*.

"I should only detract from this, if I did more than affix the signature of

"Your very affectionate Friend,

"K. C., Camb. "C. SIMEON."

"P.S. I called at Dr. Godfrey's, assured that he would gladly give you a Testimonial: but, alas! he was gone from College, and I know not his address.

"If a Testimonial be wanted from Professor Farish, and Professor Scholefield, I can get them in an instant. But all the Heads of Colleges, and all the Professors in the University, cannot speak so forcibly as the facts which I have given. Is talent wanted? Is diligence desired? Is amiableness of deportment sought after? What can speak like facts? I only regret that Mrs. W. is not with you; for if you carried ten votes, she would carry twenty. If you are chosen, Ipswich will long bless the persons who brought you both amongst them.

"Let me hear how you go on."

As Charles Simeon himself says, this letter speaks not Volumes only but Libraries. Whether it was a curacy or a living that Mr. Wright had been offered at Ipswich, we do not know: and whether he was successful or not, we cannot say; but we cannot conceive his competing for anything and failing, for he was a head and shoulders above any other man of his time, excepting the few men who, like Charles Simeon, were outside the pale of comparison.

In any case he could not have remained very long in Ipswich, for very soon after the above circumstances, we hear of him as Domestic Chaplain to H.R.H. the late Duke of Cambridge, and a great favourite with the Duchess, near whom it was often his privilege to sit, when he was required to say grace at dinner.

We remember an amusing though trifling anecdote, which Mr. Wright himself would tell with much spirit. It was in the first days of his Royal Chaplaincy: days when, not as now, the dishes were placed upon the table, and the host assisted his guests.

On this occasion fowls happened to be placed before the Duke.

"Mr. Wright, what may I send you?" said His Royal Highness.

"Whatever your Royal Highness pleases," returned the Chaplain, who probably was a little nervous in these early days of his elevation to Royal circles.

Whereupon the Duke, wishing to give his Chaplain a lesson, sent him nothing.

A few days later, and again fowls were placed before the Duke.

"Mr. Wright, what may I have the pleasure of sending you?" said His Royal Highness, with a shrewd smile.

"A wing, may it please your Royal Highness," promptly replied the Chaplain, now learned in the art of giving a direct answer to a simple question.

From this time, Mr. Wright spent many years of his life at Court, the intimate friend and companion of some of the highest in the land. We hear of him as Master of Berkeley Chapel, the most popular preacher of the day. The roadway every Sunday morning was almost impassable from the carriages of the fashionable world who thronged to hear him. He became one of the most conspicuous lights in London society. No man was more sought after; the dinner-table that secured him was considered the most fortunate. Honours of every description were heaped upon him. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Society, as well as of all the lesser Societies then existing. His own house was a marvel of splendour, though never outstripping the bounds of good taste. He was a most intimate friend of Queen Adelaide, who thought he had no equal. "He is a good man," she one day remarked to her Almoner; "let nothing be denied him that he desires."

If any man's head could be turned by prosperity, surely Mr. Wright was in danger at this period of his career.

The attention, the praise, the flattery, the affection he received from all ranks of society, from Royalty and crowned heads downwards, must have proved almost too much for mortal being. He became, and he remained to the last day of his life, one of the most courtly men of his time, with a charm of manner not to be described. With it all he was one of the most genial and kindly of men, who always knew the best thing to say and the right moment to say it. No one could be in his presence for three minutes without feeling that he was a giant amongst men. In his person he was extremely imposing. There was a dignity about him which could not be mistaken. His head was magnificent, but so well shaped that its great size was not observed. The broad forehead rose in a lofty dome, which in later years, when the writer first knew him, was set off by a fringe of curling white hair.

Once when consulting Professor Donovan, the phrenologist of that day, the latter remarked:

"Sir, I do not know who you are, but this I do know: that you

ought to succeed in everything you undertake. Your brain is two inches larger than any brain that ever came under my hands. I see that you are a clergyman, and that is what Nature intended you to be. Failing that, you ought to have been a barrister. But you would have ruined half your clients' causes, for your failings are rashness and impulsiveness. Your organ of benevolence is too largely developed, and in spite of all your talent, no matter how rich you may now be, you will have to be careful that you do not die a poor man."

At that time the caution seemed almost superfluous, for Mr. Wright was not only what may be called a monster of prosperity, but was also in possession of ten thousand a year—a very large income sixty and seventy years ago. There seemed no reason why this should not last for ever. There was moreover scarcely an influential person in the kingdom of whom he did not possess the ear.

We repeat, that if ever Mr. Wright was in spiritual danger it was now. He had his failings as we all have ours: but all have not his virtues. He loved magnificence: the very greatness of his mind, the very geniality and generosity of his temperament caused him to err on the side of display and ceremony. And, look which way he would, his eyes met nothing else. All the pomp and etiquette, the gold and glitter of Court life surrounded him; and he was made to feel himself one of the greatest acquisitions in the most distinguished assemblies of the day. When he entered a drawing-room, all radiated towards him. His refined but magnificent voice was soon heard flowing through the room, and at once prepossessed you in his favour. It was marked by a ring of sincerity, which can never be mistaken or assumed; very sweet and musical, it charmed the ear. Joined to his singular eloquence, it took everyone captive: and it was a saying that Mr. Wright's voice would win you even against your reason.

His powers as a conversationalist were not less great than his eloquence as a preacher. His memory was marvellous; his stores of anecdote inexhaustible; his way of narrating them we have never heard equalled. He was a perfect host in himself: with all the self-possession which generally comes to the man of the world, and enables him to make the very most of his powers.

And so none will wonder if Mr. Wright was in danger of becoming wedded to the world, of loving its pomps and vanities, its luxury and its display, the praise of men and the smiles of Royalty, more than was good for his spiritual welfare, or possible to the just fulfilment of his ordination vows. But he was too great and conscientious a man to be allowed to drift. He himself, if realising his danger, would have been the very first to pray earnestly and constantly: "Remove far from me the temptation."

And it was taken from him.

Suddenly his health broke down; the doctors told him that he must leave London or they would not answer for the consequences. The constant whirl of fashionable life; the continual strain upon

his intellect; the claims of his church on the one hand, and of society on the other: all proved too much for one who though a giant in constitution, possessed a sensitive and highly-strung nervous system. Amongst other symptoms, neuralgia seized him as its victim, though we believe that in those days it was known by a simpler name. It would take him in the hand and arm, so suddenly and with such force that in a moment he would be struck down to the ground with intensity of pain. Repose of body, rest to the nerves, fresh air, these were said to be henceforth indispensable. London must know him no more, excepting as an occasional visitor.

John Wright was not a man to hesitate where his duty was plainly marked. It must have cost him many a pang, many a regret to give up all his splendour and magnificence and popularity, his intimacy with Court circles, and his Sunday ministrations to those who could best appreciate him—the highest and most intellectual in the land; but it was done, and done at once. The living of Great Malvern was offered to him and accepted, and he became master of the beautiful Abbey Church; a marked contrast to the plain Berkeley Chapel which had lately known him: a contrast which appealed to all his sympathies, for his refined nature loved everything that was beautiful both in Nature and in Art.

At Great Malvern his popularity did not forsake him. Wherever he went, his charm went also.

He was a lover of hospitality: as liberal to his rich guests as he was good and benevolent to the poor. He became the intimate friend of all the county society for miles round, with most of which he was already acquainted.

His house was admirably appointed, and his frequent dinner parties were much sought after. Mr. Wright was a man who could not live without coming into contact with his fellow-men, and he was never so happy, never shone so brilliantly as when, in his own home, he was surrounded by a party of intimate and illustrious acquaintances. His geniality and his subdued but hearty laugh were infectious, whilst his eloquence held every one spell-bound. At one of his dinner parties, however, a slight *contretemps* happened, which probably no one regretted more than the chief actor in the scene, when it had all passed away.

Amongst other hospitable traits, Mr. Wright's dinner parties were celebrated for the excellence of their wines. On one occasion, a guest present had committed the indiscretion of taking a little more than was good for him. This guest had never been a favourite with the Vicar, but he was a personage who could not be always passed over. On the table was a rare and costly dessert service which had been given to the host as a testimonial. In front of this said personage there happened to be placed upon one of these matchless dishes a pine-apple. When the moment of dessert arrived, the somewhat elated guest took up a knife and with tremendous force slashed down the

middle of the pine, cut the dish in half beneath it, and cut the cloth beneath the dish.

None knew better than the Vicar how to turn aside such an accident; no one possessed more tact. Whatever he may have felt, he showed nothing: and in a moment, with all his charming ease of manner, he turned the conversation to something that was happening a hundred miles away.

But the evening was not over.

As some of the guests were departing, it seemed that fate was determined to revenge the Vicar for his broken dish. The offending guest reached the top of the staircase, missed his footing, and pitched from the top to the bottom of the stairs, where he was assisted up and conveyed to his carriage with a damaged head.

"My dear Wright," said Lord C———y, who was amongst the guests, "Fortune is revenging you. Poor X. broke your dish, and she has broken his head."

"Hush!" cried the Vicar; "we must not say that; I will forgive the fracture to my dish, if only Fortune has not fractured his skull. Poor X!—he cannot help it."

But he was never again a guest at the Vicar's dinner table.

One of Mr. Wright's most intimate friends at this time was Lady Emily Foley, one of the best, most earnest, and most philanthropic of women; and the good that she did in the neighbourhood with the aid of the Vicar, was known to few.

Very much of Mr. Wright's life at this time would read almost as a romance if written: but in the space of a few pages it is impossible to do more than allude to it. We are not writing a biography, but merely a passing record, a tribute of affection to a great man who had long outlived his day and generation: who found himself the last survivor of all the great and illustrious people with whom in his time he had been intimate, and enjoyed almost the greatest of earthly happiness—the pleasures of friendship.

Had Mr. Wright only kept a diary of his life, a record of the people he had known and many of the passages of their acquaintance, it would undoubtedly have formed one of the brightest, most interesting, and most valuable books ever published; full of anecdotes and full of facts that would now become historical; for he could carry his memory back to days long before the Battle of Waterloo. But he never attempted anything of the sort. To hear him converse upon those times a few years before his death, relating anecdotes of things that had happened early in the century, bringing before you vividly and with strange reality, famous people who had lived long since, was like listening to a page of remote history, yet infinitely more forcible and life-like than anything ever written in history. Nothing, for instance, ever gave the writer so distinct a portrait of good Queen Adelaide, as Mr. Wright's descriptions of her, and his numerous anecdotes concerning her. To him—the writer—she

stands out as a personage with whom he had come into familiar contact. And so with many people before her time, who were celebrated for their deeds, worth, or talents: and who are now more or less historical.

But to return to Great Malvern.

Even these days were to come to an end. It seemed as though one of Mr. Wright's favourite texts was to be applied to him personally: "Here we have no abiding city." Again health failed, so seriously that he could not retain his living and do his duty in it. He was at all times keenly alive to the voice of conscience, and he decided to resign. A long interval of travelling was supposed to be the best thing for him, and he entered upon it. Henceforth for many years his place was to know him no more. He went abroad, going from place to place, carrying his charm with him and always making friends.

Years afterwards, when Mrs. Henry Wood was staying at Great Malvern during a period of serious illness, she was speaking to one of the humble donkey-women who happened to be near St. Ann's Well. She was an old woman who had lived all her life in the neighbourhood.

"Do you remember Mr. Wright, who years ago was Vicar of Great Malvern?" asked Mrs. Henry Wood. "Was he liked when he lived amongst you?"

"Do I remember him, ma'am?" cried the woman. "Was he liked?" clasping her hands in earnestness, whilst the tears came to her eyes. "Ma'am, his name is still blessed amongst us. We never had his like in Malvern before, and we never shall again."

Some time after, Mrs. Henry Wood gratified Mr. Wright by recording the little incident to him. For we are all human, and who does not like to feel, when he has passed away, that he dwells in the hearts of those who remain behind?

When Mr. Wright first entered into the writer's life, the latter was a young lad living abroad with his parents.

Mr. Wright came to them with an introduction from mutual friends, and an intimacy was soon formed which only death interrupted. Even in those days he had very nearly reached the allotted span of life, yet was in all essential points still a young man. He had regained in great measure his vigorous health, though occasionally suffering. His mind could never have been stronger, nor his eloquence greater than at that time. But for his grey hairs and a certain portliness, he might have been less than middle-aged. His voice was fresh, musical and charming. He was full of energy, overflowing with life, sparkling with wit. Years had only mellowed him. He now possessed all the wisdom of experience added to all his other gifts.

It chanced that he took a great fancy for the writer, and thought he saw in him signs and promises which existed only in his own mind.

Frequent walks and conversations ended in his making a proposition to the boy's father.

"I want you to give me C.," he said one day. "Make him over to me. Let me become responsible for him. I have no occupation —let me become his tutor, and I will engage to fit him for any examination you might desire him to pass, or any college he might wish to enter. With me it will be a labour of love: and I don't think you will ever regret it."

The proposal, fortunately for the writer, was accepted, but in a modified form. The parents could not part with the lad: and they could only agree to the proposal on condition that Mr. Wright would accept such a consideration as any first-rate tutor would have received under similar circumstances.

It was a new era in the boy's life, and one for which he was ever afterwards grateful. If Mr. Wright possessed one gift more than another, it was the gift of imparting knowledge. Everything under his hands, explained by his clear and comprehensive mind, became easy. More Latin and Greek were learned with him in one year than would have been acquired in three or four years at a public school. With him all the drudgery of learning was lost sight of. Every task was a pleasure; if ever there was a royal road to learning he possessed it. When twelve o'clock came, signal for ceasing work, it brought regret, not relief. He was as great in mathematics as in classics; it would have been difficult to puzzle him in either.

In other branches of education he was equally well read. There was not a place on the atlas that he would not immediately point out to you; not an event in history of which he did not know the date and details. His memory was marvellous and seemed to embrace all subjects and all time; and it was as strong and clear at seventy as it could have been forty years earlier.

Whatever subject he took up, his graphic mind brought vividly before you. Sometimes in their walks he would begin talking of the days of Ancient Rome; and draw such pictures that you were soon lost in the past. You trod the floor of the Palace of the Cæsars; you watched the gilded pageantry upon the classic Tiber; you listened to the clash of arms in the plains beyond as foe met foe in deadly combat; you felt yourself the very centre of conspiracies, and saw the gleam of the assassin's dagger taking Cæsar's life; you journeyed on the Appian Way with St. Paul, and saw him parting from his companions at the *Three Taverns;* you lost yourself in the mazes of the gloomy catacombs; and again, were assisting at the Easter festivities, watching the Pope with outstretched arms blessing the thousands of bowed heads under the shadow of St. Peter's.

Or perhaps the scene of conversation would be the Isles of Greece, whose shores are for ever washed by the transparent waters of the Mediterranean; where the air is for ever clear and bright and the hills are exquisite in form. In spirit they would wander back to the days of

Phidias and the glories of the Parthenon; days when she was great in Art and cultivated the beautiful as it had never yet been known. A charm surrounded Attica, which for the writer has never faded. He saw Athens as she then was; stripped of the magic halo of time, which now casts a glamour and an illusion over her ill-paved streets. They mounted to the Acropolis and looked out upon that marvellous world crowded with the beauties of Nature and Art, with lovely hills in outline on the one hand and the far-famed matchless sea on the other. Together they would visit the Temple of Zeus with its wonderful pillars, and, mentally always, would gaze upon the small hill of the Areopagus, where Paul preached to the Athenians under the shadow of the matchless Parthenon; and so on to the gate of the Acropolis, with its barren rocks, its fallen pillars, and the temple of Wingless Victory; the shimmering sea lying in the sunshine, backed by those sleeping mountains amidst which Ægina and Argolis are conspicuous.

And again a few words would transport them from the lofty Acropolis of Athens to the well-worn pavements of the Roman Forum, with its classic arches and wonderful temples almost overshadowed by the stupendous walls of the Coliseum, all brightened by the matchless Roman skies.

Everything in Mr. Wright's hands became a delight. He had the rare faculty of at once arousing your interest and enchaining your mind. To come into daily, hourly contact with him was a rare privilege. Though he had ceased to take part in Court life, he had lost none of his courtliness. Essentially refined and well-bred, it was impossible that he should not have a lasting influence upon one whose character was still forming. And so the writer esteems his intimacy with John Wright one of the chief privileges and pleasures of his life.

Between himself and Mr. and Mrs. Henry Wood a lasting friendship sprang up: and long after Mr. Henry Wood had passed away, the writer has seen Mr. Wright shed tears at the recollection of his friend. "I think," he would say, "he was the most fascinating and lovable man I ever met with in the whole course of my life."

He was one of Mrs. Henry Wood's greatest admirers, and would declare that she caused him to believe that there was such a thing as secular inspiration. He was wont, the writer well remembers, to pay her a compliment she well deserved. "In all the days of my life at Court," he would say, "I have seen many a beautiful hand and arm; but I never saw one that could in the least approach that of Mrs. Henry Wood." It was quite true: her hand and arm were matchless. He had the greatest possible admiration for her talent, but still more for herself; and he would say, that, charming as Mrs. Henry Wood's heroines were, she herself excelled them all. Night after night her drawing-room would be made eloquent with his rare conversational powers. Often he would challenge her to a game of chess, and though a famous player himself, more often than not she was the

victor—as befitted the last representative of a great chess-playing family. Her father had been one of the best players of his day.

We have said that Mr. Wright possessed the gift of narrating anecdotes in a manner we have never heard equalled. His energy and vivacity, his wonderful command of language, his graphic powers of description—all was brought to bear upon the subject in hand. But if he excelled in one species of story more than another, it was in a ghost story. Many an evening his friends' younger children were allowed to leave the schoolroom for the drawing-room by way of special indulgence, and would listen absorbed, enraptured, thrilled, to ghost stories and Eastern tales, which, it is needless to say, were not of a kind to inspire terror or lead to nightmare: stories that in the charm of their telling would equally interest his older hearers. Those were famous evenings; red letter days in life; and days that, occurring at the most impressionable age, must needs remain in the memory as long as life lasted.

It is a rare picture that rises before the mind's eye. The picture of a strangely beautiful and graceful and gracious hostess, with all the softness of womanhood about her, and all the charm and sparkle of intellect; the pale, refined face of the host, only less brilliant himself than his guest, and the courtly, eloquent, delightful divine, always fastidiously correct in dress, whose rich musical voice would flow out in a constant stream of eloquent and witty conversation. A more remarkable trio could not have been brought together.

But time does not stand still, and those days passed away: and foreign lands gave place to home skies. When "East Lynne" was written and the author became famous, no one rejoiced more sincerely than her old friend John Wright, who saw all his prophecies fulfilled.

The years passed on and still this wonderful and aged man did not grow old. When nearly seventy years of age, he had married again and lived to see the eldest of three children born of that marriage attain the age of thirty! When past eighty years of age, he thought he should like to enter once more into active service. His faculties seemed as fresh and vigorous as ever, perfectly unimpaired. The important living of Falmouth—in point of emolument one of the best livings in England—was offered to him and accepted: and he held it for nearly ten years.

During that ten years the writer frequently visited him; and those visits are amongst his pleasantest recollections. The charm began the moment the house was entered, and ceased only when the house was finally left.

One of the Rector's favourite amusements was to take a "clergyman's week," and he and his quondam pupil would depart on a twelve days' drive round the coast. The Rector, using his own carriage, his coachman knowing every inch of the two counties and many an out-of-the-way nook of beauty: would travel about twenty or twenty-five miles every day; reaching home again on the Saturday week, in time for the

Sunday service: and generally they had wandered so far that the last day was spent in returning by train. In this way the writer grew intimate with all the beauties of the Cornish and Devon coast: beauties that became dear to his heart. Every mile of the way, every hour of the day, and every day of the excursion became charming and memorable from the store of knowledge, the fund of wit and humour, which flowed from the Rector like an inexhaustible stream: and when the unlucky Saturday evening arrived, it seemed that they had gone through months of rich experience.

At Falmouth, as everywhere, he won golden opinions and endeared himself to all hearts. When he took possession of the living, his congregation might almost have been numbered by units; but before many Sundays had passed not only was every seat in the church filled, but the aisles were crowded with people who stood throughout the service.

This he retained for some years. At length, when past ninety years of age, he thought he ought to retire in favour of a younger and a better man. A younger could easily be found, but a better, never. He was still full of life and energy. To all appearance his faculties were as brilliant as ever; and he looked very little older than when the writer first knew him. But it is possible that he began to feel the need of repose, the burden of years: and so he resigned his living and Falmouth knew him no more. He returned to Norfolk, which had been his home, where he had many ties; and from the warm breezes of Cornwall to the storms of the more rugged coast the writer had to transfer his visits. But had the Rector chosen Iceland or Siberia for his dwelling-place, still the visits would have been paid.

At ninety-four years of age he came up alone, seemingly in full health and strength, to the funeral of his old friend Mrs. Henry Wood, whose death was one of the sad events of his life. And if anything could have brought consolation to a home plunged into the very depths of sorrow and bereavement, it was his presence. But at such a moment, even he was powerless to offer anything but the profoundest sympathy. At her funeral he was one of the chief mourners, and aged and grey, his magnificent head bare to the wintry sunshine, he was a remarkable and most impressive figure.

A few years before his death he gave to the writer a large trunkful of his written sermons: sermons that in years gone by had been preached before Royalty and had held many a fashionable congregation spell-bound. They are amongst the writer's treasures: written out in the clear and beautiful hand for which their author was famous. They are wonders of eloquence, of orthodoxy, of spirituality, of terse and vigorous English, the best examples of a nervous and finished style. Lately when showing one or two to a friend, himself a most exceptional preacher, he was greatly struck with them. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "we have no such sermons, no such preachers now. We want more men like Wright in the Church."

Mr. Wright was a sound Churchman. He was also a man who could tolerate nothing in the way of hypocrisy or insincerity: could never put black for white, or sweet for bitter. His doctrine was that the seat of religion must be the heart, and outward forms and ceremonies availed little. With the so-called advanced party: with the Ritualistic movement, which made great strides in the later years of his life: he had no sympathy; but on the contrary feared its probable effects in the future. What he had been in his earlier years, he remained; consistent throughout to his views, never parleying with his conscience. Not to have been made Primate of all England would he have conceded a hair's-breadth of what he considered right. Yet a more tolerant man, one more full of generous sympathy and kindly feeling towards all men, never lived.

We have seen what Charles Simeon thought of him. At this moment we have before us another of his letters, which we feel inclined to quote. We have hesitated, for it has really nothing to do with the matter in hand, and may seem out of place. But it gives a peculiar insight into the character of one of the greatest men of his day; it has the value of antiquity, for it was written when the century was young; it is like a voice speaking out of a tomb long closed: and it proves the earnestness which his friend John Wright was already bringing to bear upon his calling.

It is evident that other correspondence upon the subject had taken place, but what that correspondence was must be left to the reader's imagination:

"By return of post.

"My dear Friend,—I can have no room left for contention with Mr. Leigh. It is all very well to speak of yours as a District Church; and of my Right of Presentation consequent upon it. What must ensue but quarelling, and perhaps a lawsuit? I can suffer no room to be left for these. You can see in Mr. L.'s refusal to vacate, what must arise in the event of anything being done contrary to his will. I wish it then to be understood that what I have given is only given in the event of those objects being attained for which it is given; and that in the failure of those it must be returned. This has been declared from the beginning: and I must not be asked to depart from it.

"This is my answer to your first letter.

"Now let me thank you for your second.

"1st. Respecting difficult parts of Scripture. There is a book written for your very end by Bishop Hall, in 4to, which you may get for *2s. 6d.* I, in reading through Mr. Townsend's ponderous volumes, often wished for some explanation to be inserted. But the thought instantly occurred, *that* was not his object. He proposed an object and pursued it: and if he had comprehended what you wish, he must have made his ponderous volumes half as large again.

"It has been proposed to me to add critical notes to my work. What was my object? To comprehend in 21 volumes what, if written in the common way, would have occupied above 100 (allowing 25 Disc. to a volume), and been sold for fifty guineas, instead of for ten guineas. Terseness, comprehensiveness, and real practical utility have been my objects. Would *they* be more advanced in proportion to the additional size and expense of the volumes? *In every instance that I treat*, I do the thing you mention, and leave not a difficulty (that I am aware of) unexplained. And if I were now to go over detached passages, I should swell my work without necessity, and render the sale of it still more difficult than it is. Men with eighty pounds a year and perhaps little else, do not find it easy to give ten guineas for any book. Therefore I have purposely kept mine so low that it costs not one shilling a sermon, *though more than three farthings*. But then I *give in* the whole of Claude, which is 6 sh. more. This you will see has especial respect to Curates, who cannot get more voluminous and expensive works.

"My great object is to render the discharge of the Ministerial Office both edifying and comparatively easy. Is this attained?

"You, in going through my work, will find numberless discourses as concise as you can wish. There are some adapted to *every measure of power* which the student may possess, much help or little, as he needs.

"A thousand thanks for your kindness. If on reflection I should find that I can avail myself of any hint to improve my work, it will assuredly be improved by

"Your very affectionate Friend,

"C. SIMEON."

"K. C., Cambridge."

"I am already nearly at the close of vol. ii. and labouring with all my might to send forth the work in the most perfect way.

"What mercy to possess such vigour both of body and mind! I never was more energetic in my preaching than at this moment. But I am careful not to exceed my strength.

"Mrs. Dornford has been, and still is, very ill: but she is getting better."

What Mr. Wright was in the days of Charles Simeon, such he remained to the end of his life. He was conservative in all ways, not given to change.

Not until he was ninety-nine years of age did his intellect fail him: and then it did so in a peculiar manner. He became possessed with delusions. He thought himself some great and mighty being to whom unlimited power had been given by divine authority. He could build cities at a word; bestow titles, endless wealth on whom he would. Sometimes he would talk for hours: every sentence sensible and reasonable, but the sentences not bearing upon each

other. There were days when he would never cease talking for twenty-four hours, and at the end of that time his voice would be as strong, and he as untired as if he had just awakened out of sleep, whilst those about him would be exhausted and worn out. At times he would know them all: at others would think himself surrounded by strangers.

March came in: and with it a change. The wonderful life was evidently about to depart. There was a day when he no longer left his room; and a few days before he was a hundred years old, he breathed his last.

So passed away one who had long outlived his age. Had he died fifty years sooner, the papers would have rung with his praises, sermons would have been preached about him, books would have been written. For he had one of the greatest intellects of his time—he was a man of the greatest influence, and of world-renown. These lines have done feeble justice to such a nature: but only a contemporary of John Wright could have written a fitting record of his life, and only the pen of a Boswell, passing with him side by side through all his days, could have recorded all his eloquence, all the passages of his eventful career. There has never been but one Boswell; and it may be said there never was but one John Wright.

Just one year ago, full of age and honour, he entered upon that long journey from which there is no returning; the goal towards which, from the hour of his birth, he had for a hundred years been slowly and patiently travelling. It may truly be said that he fell asleep, the mortal putting on immortality; and that after life's fitful fever he sleeps well. There was no disease, no illness, nothing but worn-out nature gently transferring the scene. No doubt he had his weaknesses, his failings and temptations; no one is perfect, he held himself least of all so. But in a most eminent degree he possessed the three great gifts and graces of Faith, Hope and Charity; and we repeat that if we were asked to engrave a text upon the tombstone which covers his great heart and intellect, it should be:

"Here lies one who loved his fellow men."

CHARLES W. WOOD.

HELEN CHALLONER.

I.

Sir Reginald Hamilton to Miss Challoner, Florence.

MY DEAR HELEN,—Do you wonder who addresses you by this familiar name, and will you look at the signature before proceeding further? It is fifteen years since we last waltzed together at the farewell ball before I sailed for India; and though we exchanged a few letters after, I hardly dare hope that even my hand is remembered by you.

My wife died two years ago, leaving me two children, a boy of ten and a girl of eight years. As I am sufficiently well off to retire from office I have come home to England to look after the education of my little ones.

I have before me now your little portrait with some other precious relics of former days, when we danced and laughed and rhymed together during five happy years of our young lives. Do you still look like that, I wonder? Have those mirthful hazel eyes lost their brightness? Have the masses of brown hair diminished? has the rose-tinted cheek faded? Have the troubles and sorrows of life subdued your once gay spirit? Even so, you would still be dearer to me than any other woman living. To me you would always be the same Helen, for my affection was based on something more stable than admiration of your beauty. You must have known that I loved you while we talked of friendship; and you must have divined the reason why I did not ask you to be my wife—because I was too poor and insignificant.

I married! Well, I will leave that page of my history untouched. I am now free, and I offer you in all humility, knowing my own unworthiness, my hand and a home in our own country, which it is in your power to make happy if you will, and where you will be in the society you were born to adorn. Dear Helen, do not answer hastily; take time to consider. My children cry to you for a mother's care, and their father entreats and prays you to bless his house with your bright presence.—Your devoted friend,

REGINALD HAMILTON.

Miss Challoner to Sir R. Hamilton, London.

MY DEAR REGINALD,—I have received and considered your letter. I am quite sensible of the honour you do me, and the advantages you offer. You have achieved distinction in two different walks of life; while I am an old maid of limited means, unknown to fame. And

yet in the old days of our early friendship and comradeship we seemed pretty equal. I was as devoted to literary pursuits as you, and generally called bright. Well, the race is to the swift, and victory to the strong; between man and woman it must always be an unequal race, and I do not grumble against a law of nature. In my case outward circumstances combined to hamper me. But I believe I am straying from the subject immediately under consideration. I will first give you my views of the matter in the abstract and then make the personal application.

It seems to me that youth is the natural time for mating. Even if a pair are somewhat divided in tastes the pliability of youth and a mutual desire to please will make them grow together by degrees until the little sacrifices of the first months cease to be sacrifices. At middle life a woman has generally lost that adaptability. After having been her own mistress for many years she hardly knows how to surrender her freedom with grace and dignity. Either she sticks to her old ways and becomes crotchety and disagreeable, or she is slavishly anxious to please, and worries her husband with too much attention. She has hitherto lived her own life, selected her own residences, formed her own friendships. On marrying she must give up this individualism and merge herself in a dual existence, of which hers is the weaker component part.

In return she gains a more important position and the society and protection of a man whom she likes and esteems. (At forty, my dear friend, the less said about love the better; and if there was less pretence of sentiment elderly marriages would prove more satisfactory.) The man gains in comfort by having a lady at the head of his house, and for many men this means much. But does he not also give up something? Some of his freedom is curtailed as hers is, though not in the same measure. We English who are nothing if not domestic, laugh at the Frenchman who, when urged by a friend to marry the lady to whom he was attached, replied, "Where then should I spend my evenings?" I find much sense in his remark. A man of mature years ought to think twice before he transfers his chosen friend from her own hearth to his. When the cares of the day are done she puts on her holiday humour with her evening dress, welcomes her friend with a joyful smile, takes an interest in his pursuits and projects, counsels and consoles him in times of trouble, and expects the like good offices from him. Would she be more kind or love him better if he had the right to bounce into her study without knocking, to tell her a chimney was smoking, the cook was late with the dinner, or his new silk umbrella had been stolen out of the hall? Not a bit of it. Nor would she seem so sweet as she might have done had these mishaps been related by her own fireside in the evening.

You see, my dear Reginald, if I do not believe in love at forty, I believe in friendship, and I think with the Frenchman that it is possible to spoil a charming relation without gaining a solid equivalent.

Now to descend to personalities.

What a curious inconsistency you are, Reginald. For a poet, you were wonderfully prudent when you abandoned literature for law and Eastern tongues, consenting to woo the muses by stealth only and at snatch moments. It was also wise of you, when young and poor, not to ally yourself to a family of decayed fortunes. Now this practical side of your character seems reversed. Would you really take me so trustingly not knowing what changes fifteen years may have wrought? I do not mean in appearance—you expect that—but in character and habits of thought. Do you, a poet and a scholar, know so little of human nature as to suppose that a girl of twenty-one and a woman of thirty-six are one and the same? I will not talk of the troubles I have had; all have suffered; no one has a right to complain. I can still laugh and jest and enjoy the society of my friends, though not with the same heart as formerly. And I see the world with different eyes. I do not think I should be doing you a kindness in accepting you, because you would get a different wife from the one you want to take. Then as to the children, I could be kind to them; but I do not feel any yearning to be a mother to anybody's children; and in this also I feel I could not come up to the mark.

Therefore, my dear old friend, I decline your offer with thanks. I cannot be Lady Hamilton because I am not the person you suppose—a case of mistaken identity. As a proof, the Helen who now refuses to share your wealth and fame, would once have accepted poverty with you.—Believe me now and always, your true friend,

HELEN CHALLONER.

Sir Reginald Hamilton to Miss Challoner.

MY DEAR HELEN,—Your arguments against late marriages—I object to you calling them *elderly* marriages—are very ingenious and convincing. As a general rule they may be risky. But there are exceptions to all rules; I have known myself not a few happy unions contracted after the romance of youth was past; and I am quite convinced that I could make you happy. I should not be exacting or curtail your freedom; your time would be your own. I should respect your hours of study and not bounce in upon you at unseasonable moments, when you were in the midst of a tangled plot. (I know you write novels under a *nom de plume.*) I hope there is no smoky chimney in my house, but if there should be I should carefully abstain from mentioning it; I should not bore you with too much sentiment, and I should endeavour to support with equanimity your satirical sallies.

Can I promise more? These are all negations it is true; but if there is any positive virtue you would like me to practise, pray name it, and I shall endeavour to meet your wishes. If you think me selfish in wishing to transfer my dearest friend from her own hearth to mine you must remember that I have not the advantages the

Frenchman enjoyed : I cannot spend my evenings with you. I must have you altogether or resign you altogether. This last I am not going to do without a struggle.

Now, dear Helen, let me conclude with one serious word. Forgive me if I am wrong, but I think I can read between the lines and see some heavier objection in your mind than the flimsy ones you advance. You talk delicately of the changes in yourself, but you really fear changes in me which might not be agreeable to you. Well, I am not afraid to meet your searching eye. I am an older and a sadder man than when we parted. I have outlived some of my enthusiasms—some of my fads as my friends called them—but I have not, I dare affirm, deteriorated morally. I have never betrayed a friend, deceived a woman, or tried to gain advancement by disparaging a rival. I am in point of fact the same Reginald you and Walter used to know and trust. You may trust me now, Helen. Do not fear to lay your hand in mine and commit your future to my care.

A thousand thanks for the photograph ; it brought a flood of tender memories with it. How little you seem changed !—Always your devoted friend,

REGINALD HAMILTON.

Miss Challoner to Sir R. Hamilton.

You quite mis-read the lines between, my dear Reginald ; I never for a moment doubted that you are the man of stainless honour whom I had known for years. Trust you? Certainly I could trust you more than any man I have ever known. I am grieved to have unintentionally hurt you. I thought I had made it clear that it was on general and impersonal grounds that I objected. Are you satisfied? Let us be friends as of old then, and to begin, tell me about the children. When I go to England next summer we shall meet I hope, and have a long talk about old days and old friends that are no more.

In the meantime let me have your views on things ; the important, the burning questions of the day. You have not, I hope, lost your interest in home affairs. You say you have outlived some of your enthusiasms. Which? I await with impatience your reply to these questions.—Yours affectionately,

HELEN CHALLONER.

II.

IT was a bright Italian winter day, and Helen Challoner stood on the highest point of S. Miniato over the cemetery, and looked down on the beautiful city in the valley—the green Arno gleaming through the heart of it—encircled by hills, with its grand old church towers, the bells of which were pealing sweetly in the clear cold air, for it

was Christmas Eve, and on the vigil of a festival the bells ring half the day.

The sky was serenely blue, and not a cloud of smoke from the chimneys of the town dimmed her view as she looked beyond it to Fiesole and Monte Morello. Her glance swept from the little Montoliveto on her left to the Vallombrosa Mountains on her right, and then fell on the intervening slopes covered with olives which divided her from the city that lay below in its peaceful beauty. Miss Challoner said to herself that it would cost her a bitter pang if she were called on to abandon this her adopted city, the home of Art, which had so many attractions for her, the very walls of which she had learned to love.

"But I am not called on to give it up; I have said I would not," she murmured, to quiet the unaccountable sadness of her heart on this bright day when her surroundings seemed so cheerful.

Miss Challoner took her way home by the long flights of steps down Monte alle Croci. She ran down some of the steps, and even on level ground walked faster than was the mode in Florence. In the rhythmic motion of her light firm tread there was an easy grace and dignity which expressed a perfect self-reliance. She wore a costume of dark-green cashmere mixed with velvet, a velvet bonnet of the same, the sombre olive hue being enlivened by slight trimming of gold braid on both dress and bonnet. A little cape of sable fur and muff of the same completed her simple, elegant attire.

She entered the city by the gate of S. Miniato, crossed the first bridge she came to, and in a few minutes found herself in the old church of S. Croce among the tombs of the illustrious dead.

Being Christmas Eve there were more worshippers than usual at the afternoon service, but the large church was still more than half empty. Miss Challoner did not approach the altar or take any visible part in the worship. She passed up the right side and sat down in a quiet shaded spot by the wall and untied her fur. Here she abandoned herself to a reverie while the priests droned forth their monotonous chaunt.

Christmas with its recurring memories was the most melancholy time of all the year to Helen. A terrible misfortune had befallen her at this season: her only brother to whom she was devoutly attached was killed from a fall off his horse three days before Christmas. That was a great many years ago, but the season brought it all back to her, and other troubles as well. She refused to acknowledge this, and always dined gaily at the house of some friend on the great festival. It was Christmas Eve that was so difficult to get over.

Helen leaned her head against Alfieri's monument by Canova, her delicate profile standing out on the white marble as if it were carved in high relief. But the bright colour that her walk had brought to her cheeks and the green velvet bonnet did not lend themselves to that illusion.

She was a very handsome woman, but her best points did not show so well in out-of-door dress, for her figure was more perfect than her face, and her greatest beauty was the shape and pose of her head, which was exquisite. Her dark hair grew rather low on her forehead, and was brought softly back in little rippling wavelets; but the forehead itself was not low or round; it rose straight from the dark delicately-pencilled brows which projected slightly over deep-set eyes. These last were not large nor full, but lively, keen and penetrating, in colour a brown hazel. Her nose and mouth were finely and delicately modelled; her complexion white, slightly tinted with wild rose blush. Her figure was statuesque and rather above the medium height.

Altogether she was an object better worth looking at than some of the marble muses who presided over the tombs of the poets.

When she had rested, or thought out her problem, she picked up her little umbrella and took her way homewards.

This solitary self-sufficing lady, who had many friends who would have been enchanted to have her under their roof, chose to live alone in a little apartment on the third floor of an old palace, which was divided into six or seven different quarters.

She opened the door with a latch-key, and found her maid sitting by the hall-stove sewing—the cold aspect of her bedroom, and the infinitesimal proportions of the kitchen which was generally held in possession by the cook, obliging her to make a sitting-room of this cheerful apartment, which was well-lighted from the roof. She was a middle-aged widow of neat appearance, and what the Italians call *festosa* manners—that is, she made a fuss about any one she liked, and especially about her mistress, whom she thought a peerless creature.

Miss Challoner's Irish nature responded to the Italian domestic's affectionate manners; it bored her sometimes, it is true, to listen to her talk, but she did not repel her. She smiled brightly when asked if she had had a pleasant walk and "good diversion," and asked for her tea, remarking that it was very cold.

She felt a little glow of comfort, altogether materialistic, when she entered her snug *salotto*, and found a blazing wood fire, a bright copper kettle singing on the hearth, and a tiny two-storeyed tea-table placed near it. It was a pleasant change from the piercing north wind which swept down from the Apennines and raked the streets. At the chilly hour of a winter afternoon a bright fire and tea-table have charms to soothe the female mind, even though the cheering cup is to be taken in solitude.

While Miss Challoner passed under a curtain, and presumably through a door beside the fireplace to her chamber to remove her muffling, we can take a glance at her sitting-room.

It was a quaint long room, with a low vaulted ceiling, prettily frescoed. It had no less than four doors, after the Italian fashion:

one that entered from the hall, one at each end of the room, leading respectively to her chamber and studio, and a half glass door that opened upon a terrace which commanded a splendid view, and which was adorned with creepers and various plants. In summer all these doors made delightful draughts, and in winter they were draped with heavy crimson curtains.

At the end of the room, opposite the fire, there was a large well-filled bookcase of carved wood, beside it a pedestal with a marble bust; another bust stood on a cabinet between the window and the glass door, and the opposite wall was covered with oil-paintings, water-colours, etchings, medallions in marble, etc., most of which were presents from artist friends. Round some of the works of art drapery was gracefully arranged.

A writing-table stood between the fire and the window, a guitar and mandoline hung on the wall at each side of the fire-place. The furniture was well selected to harmonise with the quaint old-fashioned aspect of the room. There were some fresh flowers about, and some pretty curious objects, but there was no overloading of ornament, and the whole had an air of unpretentious elegance and comfort.

The owner of this tasteful abode did not seem out of keeping with her surroundings, though she would not have been out of place in a palace.

Helen Challoner was one of those women whose beauty seems imperishable. It was of that fine intellectual type which does not depend on the bloom and freshness of youth; but the bloom and freshness still remained, as well as the perfect proportions of her slender figure. She covered the tea-pot with an embroidered cosy, seated herself in an easy-chair, and put two small feet encased in black velvet shoes on a footstool by the fender. Then she leaned back and took a book off her writing-table, opened it, and found therein an old photograph, which she looked at for some time. She put it back and closed the book abruptly.

"He will write no more. If I will not marry him he will have none of my friendship. So like a man. And poets are not very different from other men. I have convinced him just as he had *almost* convinced me. What a clever pair!" she laughed, and her laugh was like her voice, clear and dulcet, but it had a bitter ring in it.

Helen Challoner was a woman who could never bear to give way to emotion. She had a masculine horror of tears from her early youth; no one had ever seen her weep after she was grown up. Though warm-hearted and affectionate in her happy hours, in time of affliction she hid herself from her friends until she could see them with composure.

The first grief of her life which cut deep in her heart was such as a proud girl would naturally seek to conceal, and she had concealed it most effectually. After five years of intimate intercourse with her brother's college friend, a man of uncommon gifts, to whom she felt

drawn by an intense sympathy, to whose brilliant intellect and noble character she felt her whole nature subject, she was called upon to part from him without the consolation of one word of love, compelled to meet him daily before his departure, and to regulate her expressions of regret in accordance with the friendship he professed. She played her part well, with what suffering no one suspected.

A year after she met the crushing blow of her brother's death with what seemed a stoic calm. Attending her mother in a dangerous illness, she refused to see any friend, and it was only in the silent watches of the night, when her unhappy patient slept, that she gave way to the agony of grief that oppressed her. She retired to an ante-room, where she wept low, and breathed his name softly to the night winds moaning through the trees, as she stood at the open window gazing into the dark grove.

"Walter, Walter! Oh, my brother, how shall I live a long life without you? What is there now worth living for? Why could not I die instead of you, my darling? I was so unhappy, and your life was bright and full of promise. Oh, Walter, where are you? If you can, send me a sign of comfort in my dreams!"

So the poor girl raved in her loneliness. Her young heart was bursting with grief, and it should have some outlet. She had received more than one letter from Reginald Hamilton after the sad news of Walter's death reached him in India, expressive of deep grief, sympathy, and consolation. She answered them, and then came a little poem full of pathos and tender brotherly sympathy.

Time heals all wounds, but the scar remains. Helen soon resumed her usual life, and was outwardly the same Helen as before; only her heart felt the difference.

When her mourning was over she went into society as formerly, and seemed just as bright and charming as ever. She had good offers of marriage which she refused, and hosts of admirers everywhere she went, with whom she amused herself, laughing at their sufferings, real or assumed.

Helen had a passion for literature from her youth, and began to practise writing at a very early period. Her travels in foreign countries with her parents after the estate had been sold, had enlarged her outlook, and time had improved and mellowed her sharp lively style, so that it had become very taking with editors. She wrote under a *nom de plume*, and jealously guarded her secret.

When she lost her parents in Germany, she selected Florence as a residence, induced by her love of art and the pleasant memories she retained of a former visit. She was a versatile creature, full of talent and energy. Her long, slender supple fingers were always busy with something. She played the guitar and mandoline with taste; but the most congenial work which she had taken up since her residence in Florence was modelling. When she first entered a sculptor's studio and asked for instruction she meant it as a recreation; but her

master's encouragement awakened her ambition, and she made such progress as delighted her master, a very clever man with a slight streak of genius. She had now been more than eight years at work, studying "*sul serio*" as her master told her, with great pleasure to herself, but no gain except to her teacher and her models. In fact she found her taste for sculpture a costly one owing to the expensive nature of the materials employed.

III.

HELEN sat in her easy-chair on that cold Christmas Eve, leaving her tea untouched and gazing into the fire for a brief space. Then, as if seeing some unpleasing vision there, she pressed her slim white hand on her eyes. At that moment a knock came to the door, which was opened the instant after, and behind the *portière* she heard a voice saying in Italian to the maid:—

"Thanks, I can announce myself. I am a friend of the Signorina." The voice sounded like a far-off echo down the corridors of time.

In an instant, a slight middle-aged gentleman entered, letting fall the curtain behind him. He was a man of middle height, very spare, with brownish grey hair, brownish grey moustache, and brownish grey face, which had a dried up "wilted" look, as if scorched by a burning sun. His lofty bald forehead was furrowed with thought and care, and there was a deep line at each side of his mouth. His hands and feet were small, and he had a certain air of distinction as he stood still for a moment, quietly holding his hat in a thin brown hand.

Helen rose slowly from her seat, letting her book slide from her lap to the carpet, and stood still as a statue gazing at him. When he approached her and said "Helen!" she gave him her hand mechanically; but it was not till she felt the warm pressure of his, and looked into the calm depths of his dark grey eyes—the only feature which time had left untouched—that she recovered sufficiently from the shock of his sudden appearance to give him a conventional greeting.

"Reginald, I am so glad to see you!" she said while her breath came quick and fast, and the colour which had fled from her face at the first sound of his voice returned in a rush.

"Thank you," he answered briefly and pressed her hand to his lips.

"This is a surprise; you did not say you were coming to Florence."

"No, I did not know when I last wrote; that is to say, I had not decided to come so soon. I arrived this morning."

Their manner was as quiet as if they had parted six months ago, but there was a thrill of restrained emotion in the voices of both. While they were speaking, each was searching the face of the other for the long-lost friend. Sir Reginald thought Helen marvellously young and handsome; but the fierce Eastern sun, combined with care and trouble, had wrought such a change in him that except for his

noble forehead and peculiar eyes—dark grey with large pupils intermingling with the iris, and shaded by long dark lashes—she would not have recognized him.

"You find me greatly changed," he said with a sad sweet smile, showing a slight gleam of regular white teeth under the grey moustache.

"I was prepared for that; I am changed too," replied Helen.

"Very little, in appearance."

He was still holding her hand and scanning her face. With a little nervous laugh she withdrew her hand and waved him to a chair.

"Let us have a cup of tea and we can talk after. How cold it is!"

She rang the bell, and Gigia brought fresh supplies of everything. While Helen busied herself with the teacups, Sir Reginald watched her every movement; but when she had settled down to take her tea he looked round the room and noted its contents; the marble busts especially seemed to attract his attention.

"You have a charming little nest here, Helen. Do you live quite alone?"

"Yes; I have lived here for about eight years. But in these old palaces we have neighbours under the roof with us."

"I have to congratulate you, my dear friend, on your successes, literary and artistic. You have created your own world. And you like Florence very much?"

"Better than any city I have ever lived in; it satisfies all my modest requirements. Let me give you another cup of tea."

"Thanks. It is a charming place indeed, even in its present wintry aspect. It seems independent of weather or season. But still—to live in exile from your native land!"

"You have lived in worse exile from your native land—at least I should imagine so," retorted Helen.

"Oh, but with the hope of returning. I felt it to be an exile all the while."

"You still care for England and Ireland?" asked Helen.

"That is a strange question from you. Of course I do. My heart is not so withered up as my face. But, Helen, when love of your country is still alive, why do you choose to remain—an absentee?"

"What good can I do now the old place is gone? If I owned an acre of ground it would be different. It would be almost painfu to me to return to where we were once 'lords of the soil.' What good could I do?"

"What good? You have talents. You could have influence in society—influence with the people."

"But I have lost my place there, and have made me a little niche here. You see, Reginald, I have got used to Florence, whose interests are of the past and therefore conducive to calm. And then you forget that I am a mere woman as Mrs. Micawber said, and do

everything in fits and starts. But I am not an idle woman, and I am not a woman without a country. In fact I have three. I have never lost my sympathetic interest in Ireland, my respectful interest in England; I have thrilled over Italy—her beauty, her genius, her struggles for liberty—and I rejoice in her success. But our sympathies have limitations, and when you are divided between three nationalities a time comes when you cease to thrill."

Miss Challoner said this in her old ironical vein, her beautiful little head thrown back against her easy-chair. The wintry sun had gone down and the room was growing dusky, but the flames of the blazing wood danced upon the wall, illuminated the pictures, and lit up Helen's graceful form and smiling, upturned face. The curve of her milk-white throat, the sweep of dark wavy hair above the delicate little ear, the slim white hand which played restlessly with her chain—how familiar all these seemed to Sir Reginald! He almost cheated himself into the belief that the great gap of time had been bridged over, and this was the same laughing, sparkling girl he had known in his youth.

He was standing with his back partly to the fire, his face in shade, so that Helen could not see how he looked. A short silence ensued, which he presently broke with a singular question:

"I wish you would explain me something, Helen, if you do not think it an indiscreet question from an old friend. You have had good offers: why did you never marry?"

Helen said inwardly: "And you can ask me that, Reginald Hamilton!" while her heart gave an indignant throb. Aloud she said with philosophic coolness:

"I think marriage is good only when one is driven to it by some imperious necessity; that is, the need of love, or the sense of dependence, the need of some one to lean upon which many women feel so strongly. This necessity did not exist for me. I always felt I could stand alone. Love did not come in to blind me to the defects of my suitors. I saw the ass's ears without any glamour on my eyes, and felt no desire to stick musk roses in them."

"And—did you meet no one who answered to your ideal?" asked Sir Reginald with deep interest.

She shook her head.

"In youth my ideal had been formed on too high a model. I could not come down."

Helen met the poet's earnest eyes without any coquettish blush or lowering of her lids. He had not lived forty-three years in the world and achieved greatness without having received his share of adulation and admiration, and he had become indifferent to it. But those simple words which Helen spoke of her former self, as if it were some far-off forgotten history, "In my youth my ideal had been formed on too high a model," made the blood tingle in his pale brown cheeks and brought a new light in his dark grey eyes. His bald temples throbbed. After a pause he spoke:

"Perhaps you were blind in the days of your inexperienced youth, and see with different eyes now."

The quiet modest tone in which he said this touched some sensitive chord in Helen's heart. She could not bear to wound the feelings—or at least the pride—of the sad-eyed poet.

"No, Reginald, I think now as I thought then. You are first in my esteem—always have been." She gave him her hand with more cordiality than she had yet shown him. He pressed it fervently to his lips.

"I should have known the touch of this dear hand had I been blind, like the old bard Carolan who recognised his lady after twenty years' absence by the touch of her hand. You will laugh at that perhaps. Does it seem impossible?"

"All things are possible to a poet," replied Helen with a laugh. She would have withdrawn her hand, for she felt she could not repel him while he held it in his warm clasp. Banter she had always found an effective weapon with an importunate lover; it acted like a cold douche on the tender passion. But she felt powerless to jest since he had possessed himself of her hand. Sir Reginald perceived his advantage.

"Helen," he said in a voice full of feeling, "I always knew you had a heart in spite of your determination to conceal it. In one thing only you succeeded in blinding me, but that was a cruel—a fatal deception."

"Deception, Sir Reginald?"

She snatched her hand from his.

"Forgive me—I can call it by no other name. You must have known how I felt, and you took care to make me understand that your friendship was all that I might ever hope to aspire to. Oh, Helen, what a fate your pride consigned me to! And you—" he continued with emotion, "it is no presumption for me to say it now—you might have had a happier and fuller life had you not cased your heart in an armour of steel. When I think of the troubles you have had to face alone when I might have shared the burden—and what I have suffered—I cannot refrain from reproaching your pride."

"My pride, Reginald, was that of any self-respecting girl. I did not know that you cared for me more than you cared for Walter. Or if, like a foolish girl, I did sometimes dream it, I was ashamed and angry with myself; I thought your northern prudence would prevent you making an undesirable marriage; for our fortunes were on the wane."

"And what were mine? A poor young man with his own way to make in the world, it might well have been considered presumption in me if I had dared to open my heart without some encouragement."

"Well, we both made a mistake—and we have had reason to regret it," Helen replied with unusual gentleness, but still keeping her emotion well under. She had grown pale when Sir Reginald began his charge, but she remained calm. "I am sorry, believe me, for your sake as well as my own. You have twice spoken of suffering which you have undergone. To what did you allude?"

"Need you ask? My marriage turned out most unhappy—unsuitability of mind and character. I will not blame my wife; it was not her fault; she could not help herself. She did not suit me; there was only one woman in the world who would have suited me. I did not suit her; she did not sympathise with my pursuits, she cared nothing for poetry. These elements of discord would have been sufficient—but jealousy was added. Soon after our marriage she found in my absence in my drawer, among other little souvenirs, your miniature which you gave me at parting. She would not believe that it was all that remained to me of a friend I was never more to see. Henceforth foul suspicion haunted my life. Thank heaven I was able to fulfil my duty to the end. Enough. I have said I should not open this page of my history. I have been unhappy. What then? Others have been equally so. It is the common lot. But when I think of what might have been—that nothing stood between us two but pride, I think pride the most hateful of sins."

Sir Reginald approached Helen while he was speaking and his toe touched something on the carpet. He stooped and picked up a handsome copy of Tennyson, which he had given her when he was going away, and in it was his own photograph. He closed the book and laid it gently on the table. Then he drew a chair to her side, and seating himself, took the hand that lay in her lap.

"Helen," he said tenderly, "you see I am but the wreck of what I once was. But my heart, believe me, is not dead! your image has been enshrined in its innermost depths for nearly twenty years—for I loved you from a boy—when you were not yet sixteen. All that is left of my life—and I feel what a poor offering it is—shall be dedicated to your happiness. This dear hand must and shall be mine. Stay—do not answer me yet. Listen! I have revisited Ireland, having heard that your father's property was to be sold, and have purchased it for half its original value. I am going to settle in Slievemoyle and see what I can do for the people."

"Reginald, dear Reginald! did you do this for my sake?" cried Helen, quite overcome, her bright eyes glistening as she pressed his hand in both of hers.

"For your sake, my queen, but not altogether for your sake. Slievemoyle in all its desolation is a dear and sacred place to me for the memories it holds. Can I forget your good father whose hospitable doors were always open to me? Or your sweet mother who received the orphan boy with maternal kindness? Or my best friend Walter who was really 'more than my brothers were to me?' Do you remember the walks and rides that we three used to have together? How we used to scramble over the rocks when a storm was coming until the spray of the Atlantic drenched us; and what delightful boating excursions! Returning at sunset in a calm sea we often let the boat drift while we sang or recited poetry. Those were the sweetest and happiest moments I have ever known. It was in those

scenes that I drew my first inspiration and felt the poet within me start into life.

"When I lately stood on the hill above the house and listened to the sobbing of the wind through the wood, and felt the briny blast blowing on my face, the past fifteen years seemed blotted out—I felt strength and hope revive in me, and I knew that life was still worth the living if I chose to make it so."

Tears to which Helen had long been a stranger gathered slowly in her eyes while her lover was speaking—and now one rolled down her pale cheek and fell on Sir Reginald's hand. She was silently struggling with her emotion which had at last overmastered her, and revenged itself for being so long oppressed. She bent her head and swept away her tears, but others followed, and it seemed as if she should have to leave the room to recover her composure. But at the first movement she made to rise he was on his feet, and when she would have passed him he laid his hand on her arm and held her back; then taking her other hand he gently put her back in her chair. She covered her face with her handkerchief, and wept silently for a few minutes. She was fairly conquered. When she looked up again and met her lover's gaze, her eyes were still moist, and her whole manner so softened and subdued that it added a fresh charm to her beauty and made her look several years younger. What had become of her theories? She put her hand to her brow in thought.

"What is it, dearest?" asked Sir Reginald.

"I almost doubt my own identity; I can hardly believe it true that I should have promised; but I have not promised!"

"No, my wild sweet briary rose, you have promised nothing; you are still free. But you will be better than your word; you always were. You will not leave me to cope with all the difficulties of Slievemoyle single-handed, if it were only for the sake of the people who remember you so well? You will make the sacrifice of giving up your beautiful city, and your charming home, and the liberty which has grown dear to you, to be the companion of a grey, sad old man in a wild country, in an inclement climate, to take an interest in his children and his tenants?"

"How black you draw the picture! One would suppose that it was a hard fate to return to my old home and country, and with you. Well, whatever it may be, I accept it."

She gave him her hand, which he kissed repeatedly.

"I will do my best for the children. *Your* children must be nice But I am not going into raptures over the joy of taking care of them, not till I know them. Let us have no pretences, and do not think you are bound to play the *rôle* of lover to this old girl because she happens to suit you for a wife. Ours is a marriage of friendship, and a marriage of friendship between two sensible middle-aged people can be a very happy one."

"All right," said Sir Reginald, with that sweet smile of his, in

which the lines about the mouth disappeared, and his white teeth gleamed under the grey moustache, "I shall not bore you with sentiment. I have said I am ready to take you on your own terms, let them be as matter-of-fact as you please. We can settle some business matters."

He drew her chair to the fire, placed his own opposite, and threw a few pine cones into the blaze.

"Have you any requests to make, any special arrangements with regard to our wedding?"

"None."

"How soon may it be; could you be ready by the first of February?"

"Hardly; but I shall try to get to London as soon as possible when I have disposed of my little belongings."

"The things you care for must be brought home to furnish a Florence room as your studio—the room with the balcony, at the back of the house. When you are dull or sad you can retire and work a little, or play the guitar."

"What a happy idea, Reginald. I shall settle affairs here as soon as possible, and go to London, where I shall have my trousseau prepared. I should like the wedding to be a quiet one, no veil or orange-blossoms; a silver-grey plush dress and bonnet will just suit my age."

"I have nothing to say against the grey plush, I like quiet weddings, but as to your age, why, you look twenty-five. And where would you like to go for the—a—the wedding journey?"

"Slievemoyle, of course. That is, if it be agreeable to you, dear Reginald."

"It is the dearest wish of my heart to see you there once more. In its present state it is not an ideal home to bring a bride to, but we are sensible people, and will set to work directly to renovate."

"Oh, what a pleasure that will be!" cried Helen, with a burst of girlish joy, "and what a fairy prince you are, Reginald." And she looked at him with sparkling eyes.

He smiled back at her, and said, "Hark to the Ave Maria! Am I supposed to go away now, or may I sit another half-hour? You told me a lady was more likely to be uniformly amiable at her own fireside than at her husband's. Let me enjoy the sunshine while I may."

She nodded, smiling, and gazed into the fire without speaking.

"What are you thinking of, my queen?"

"I was thinking how nice it would be to have the children home at Easter, and let them run wild with the goats for a while. They delight in confusion and disorder, and it will do them good."

Sir Reginald's face became radiant. He rose, and with a sudden swift movement caught Helen from her chair, and pressed her to his heart with ardour. She, taken by surprise, yielded to his embrace, and when his lips sought hers she willingly gave him her first kiss of

love. She had had more lovers than most pretty women could boast of, but no man had ever received the smallest favour from her till now. In the bitterness of disappointment they had called her cold, hard, mocking, and she had liked that reputation. But now her heart thrilled like a girl with maiden pride as she laid her hand on Sir Reginald's shoulder, and looking into his face, said :

"I have been true to you, Reginald Hamilton—true as steel."

"I know it, unworthy that I am."

"And yet you dared to ask me why I had not married some fox-hunting squire, some insipid sprig of nobility, or a dogmatic, pig-headed parson."

"Forgive me, my love ; I only wanted to hear your explanation of the phenomenon. I had to feel my way, for you are not an easy conquest. You said let us have no pretences ; I have made none ; it is you who make pretences, dear. Suppose you had been my wife for fifteen years would you cease to love me now because I am no longer young? No. Why then should it seem ridiculous if we should marry for affection like other people? Away with pretences ! You have promised me your hand because your heart is mine—has always been ; I know it now."

"My heart stood still when I heard your voice," said Helen ; "and when you appeared did I look as if I had seen a ghost?"

"Quite so. But surely you expected me to come, Helen? The man is an ass who gives in in such a case without a struggle. I resolved to storm you in your own citadel. I had the unexpected delight of seeing you in S. Croce to-day, and followed you home after the manner of your Italian adorers. I came, I saw, I conquered. I have shown you that at forty-three a man has still a right to marry for love, and I mean to be as affectionate as I please." Sir Reginald wound up with his charming smile, and Helen laughed ; a soft happy laugh—it had lost the bitter ring.

"Well, my king, I hope you will be a generous victor, and remember the promises you made before I capitulated."

"I promised to *refrain* from mentioning smoky chimneys, but I should like you to ask me to *do* something. Would you like a trip to Italy in the spring?"

"Perhaps ; but I must consider about my Bill of Rights. When you entered the room and took my hand I felt it was all up with me, and that when you went away I should no longer belong to myself."

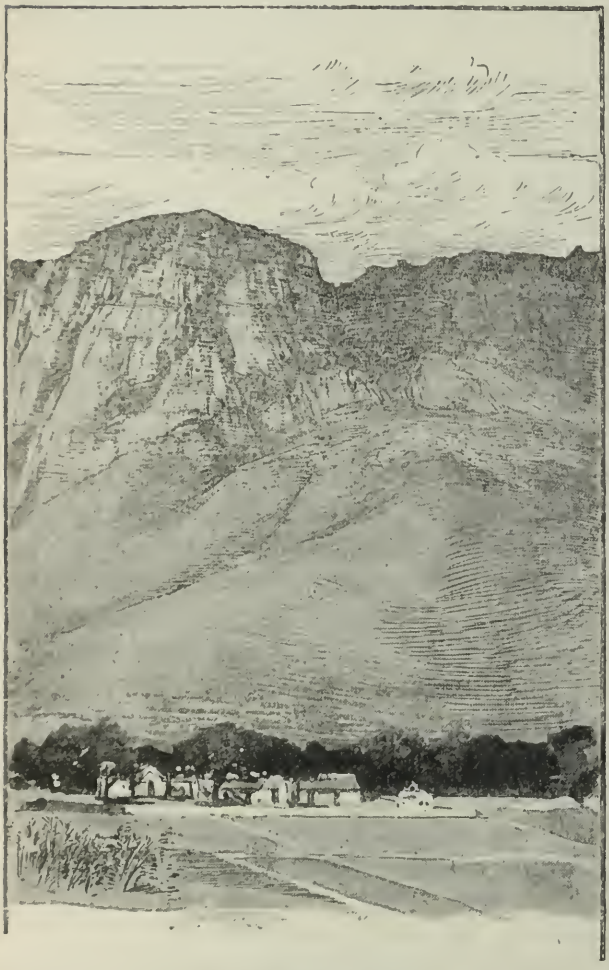
Sir Reginald smiled his sweetest smile, and said :

"Shall I confess it? I had a similar conviction !"

LETTERS FROM SOUTH AFRICA.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Letters from Majorca," "In the Lotus Land," etc., etc.

At Sea. *April*, 1893.



Stellenbosch.

CARE AMICE,—Our philanthropic and original driver, you will remember, who safely conducted us round the wonderful Victoria Road, plucked us branches of the silver tree, and unduly compassionated the gipsy-woman, wished to repeat his adventure a second time. This was impossible because we had formed plans for our next and last day for the present in Cape Town; we had other duties and pleasures in hand.

Having received an introduction to Mr. N. the minister of the Reformed Dutch Church, and therefore a descendant of the Boers, if not still one of them himself, we wished to make use of it. And I will at once say that if all the Boers in South Africa in any way resemble Mr. N. in mind and disposition, the country is fortunate in possessing them, and cannot possess too many of them.

Our visit would take us to Stellenbosch, about an hour's journey from Cape Town. It had been described to us as an old Dutch settlement—one of the oldest in the Colony; and imagination immediately conjured up quaint streets and gabled houses, and the various picturesque accompaniments of the old towns of our favourite Holland. Of course nothing was further from the fact.

We started by an early train, passing a second time over some portions of the line we had traversed the previous day. As we left the town behind us, it lay an immense area of white house upon the plain, under the shadow of the great Table Mountain. Making way, we soon found ourselves in the country, the horizon here and there bounded by distant chains of hills, many of them very peculiar in form, and unlike anything seen in our own mountainous countries of Europe. The hills of South Africa at once give it a very distinctive and characteristic appearance.

On each side of the line stretched wide cultivated plains, occasionally varied by low trees and a good deal of undergrowth. Farm-houses were dotted about, surrounded by orchards and fields that evidently would presently spring up into grain. It is only autumn here, you will remember, though to our new experience it is curious to talk of autumn in the month of April ; and winter has to be passed before the fruit and grain-bearing time comes round again. The farm-houses are very effective, with their dazzling white walls and jet black roofs, presenting the strongest possible contrast to the surrounding scenery, and standing out vividly under the blue and brilliant sky. They seem the very embodiment of peace and repose, and apparently possess all the cleanliness and neatness said to be the peculiar attributes of the Dutch ; virtues which may possibly distinguish the Boers, but most certainly are not universal in Holland, the mother country.

There was a certain amount of uncultivated land amidst all the luxuriance ; land that seemed never to have known pruning-hook or ploughshare ; arid sandy wastes covered with undergrowth which is here called Karroo, and stunted trees that seemed to serve no purpose but to give shelter to the birds : the birds of South Africa, that are not musical and sweet singing, but often of gorgeous plumage, flashing about in the air like magnificent pieces of detached rainbow. At the few railway stations they hawked delicious-looking fruit artistically piled in small baskets, and for which very modest sums were asked.

The train made way slowly, according to the custom of South African trains. In this they *do* resemble the Dutch ; loitering long, apparently for no earthly purpose but to try the patience of the passengers. The system, like everything else South African, is yet in childhood. The day will come when new and better lines will be laid, and trains will shoot through endless tracks at the rate of sixty miles an hour, annihilating time and space. At this moment South Africa presents, to all intents and purposes, the appearance of a vast uninhabited country with boundless resources. In certain spots, such as Cape Town, the people congregate ; the busy hives of this vast region ; but for the most part South Africa is waiting its population and development.

In due time we reached Stellenbosch.

The town itself is quite a mile or a mile and a half from the station, and we found ourselves in the midst of a smiling plain, backed by wonderful mountains, remarkable and picturesque in form. They towered into the sky, with sharp peaks and jagged outlines, that reminded one a little of the dolomite mountains of the Tyrol; possibly the result of some tremendous upheaval of nature in the far-off time when the earth and man were as yet unknown to each other.

The moment we left the station we somehow felt at home; in a terrestrial paradise. Not that I wish to suggest that we considered ourselves angels, or anything more closely allied to angels than the French *ange sans g.* But there is an indescribable charm about Stellenbosch which at once asserts itself, and people ought to grow into angels here. It lies in the aspect of the place, the very air you breathe. At once you are in the midst of strange beauty. The grandeur of those mountains is far more striking even than the tremendous mass of Table Mountain, the Devil's Peak and Lion's Head. The town is invisible as yet, but the long rough road before you must lead to it in time—rough only in comparison with a European macadamised roadway, but much more picturesque and primitive than that modern invention. On either side the road were stretches of sandy plain covered with green heather growth, and hillocks which might have been the graves of giants, and trees that did not bear fruit, but were very charming nevertheless; and small ponds of water in which armies of frogs were making unearthly noises, possibly going through political battles in frogland. Passing one of the ponds—oh wonderful surprise and glory of glories—we found a blue lotus flower.

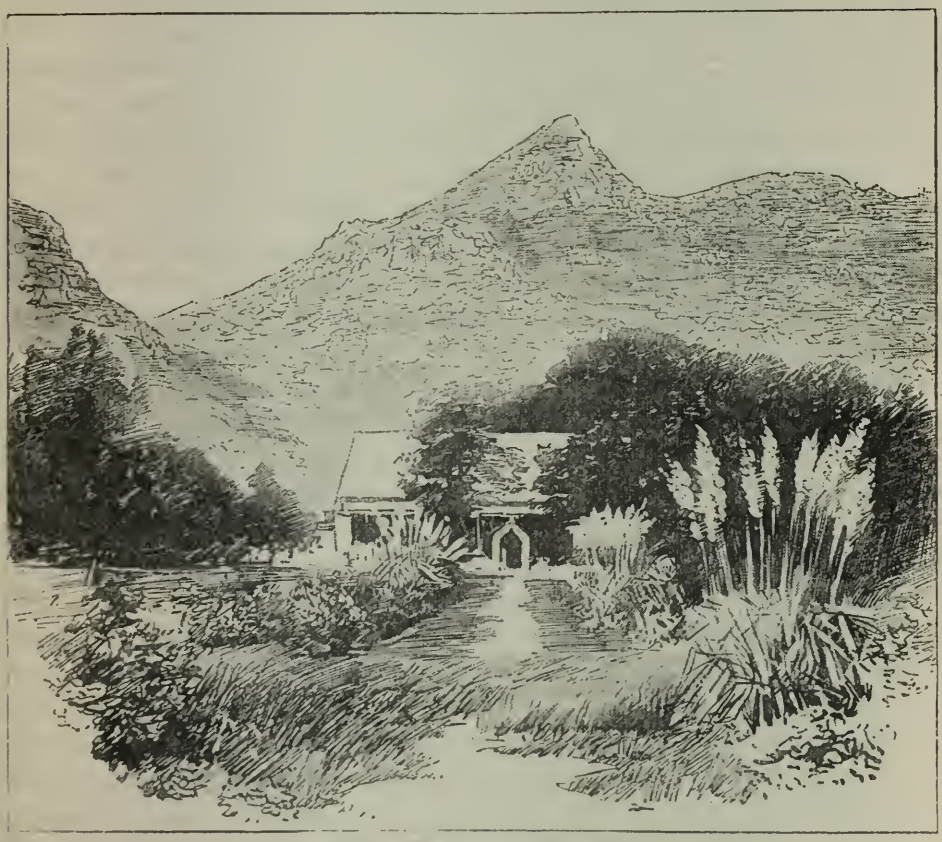
Can you imagine how for a single moment my heart ceased to beat, and my thoughts, with a mental mesmerism greater than earthly magic, flew off to days that are gone—charming days under the brilliant skies of the Lotus Land, where we lived in an atmosphere sacred to a past world? What visions were conjured up by this one small flower: for it blossomed in solitary beauty as if it had suddenly sprung up for our special delight. Visions of a flashing sunlit Nile; of moonlit Pyramids steeped in the solemn silence of midnight, the solitude of endless plains; of wonderful mosques; of the tombs of the Caliphs, where we spent those magic hours under the moonbeams; and of those charming evenings when you exercised all the witchcraft at your command, and our friendship daily grew strong and firm.

We would have plucked and carried away this wonderful solitary lotus flower, but it was out of reach, and we had to leave it to blossom in its earthly paradise.

We went on, ever before us those wonderful mountains with their splendid outlines. If all South Africa equalled this, then, after all, we should be repaid for our voyage across the ocean and the misery of passing through the Tropics. True, there were no ancient ruins or architectural glories—such as those conjured up by the solitary

lotus flower—but amidst this wonderful expanse and grandeur of nature we could for once dispense with those mighty evidences of man's labour and skill.

After walking for some time through all this beauty, we reached the commencement of Stellenbosch proper, and found it very different from anything we had anticipated. "An old Dutch town; perhaps the oldest settlement in Cape Colony," we had heard. And we had thought of Gouda, of Dordrecht, the Dead Cities of the Zuyder Zee—Hoorn and Monnekendam, with their quaint and curious architectural features; of more distant Friesland, with its handsome women and



On the Victoria Drive.

wonderful costumes. All this was a delusion. It did a little resemble such villages as Brock, with its tiny whitewashed houses, and tree-lined roads running parallel with a broad canal: but this was its only likeness to Holland—and here the canal was absent.

The place certainly looked pretty and rustic, but not Dutch-like. We first found a long row of white houses, which formed the business part of the town; the shops and modest hotels; all facing a wide plain, where soldiers may exercise, or the youth of Stellenbosch go in for Olympian games, or fairs and circuses encamp. This plain had not the beauty of the plains lying between the town and station. The whitewashed houses did not look very clean or tempting, as far

as one could judge from a passing glimpse of the interiors. At many an open door stood a cage with the small green parrot so often seen in South Africa: beautiful birds, who seem gifted with a sense of humour, so apposite are their remarks, so solemn their look, as if they quite understood all that was going on, and were much wiser than their betters.

At right angles with this were the roads leading to the upper part of the town, in which our direction lay. Wide roads lined with trees, and white houses standing far back at intervals, apparently much better kept than the shops and the inns. Houses, also with whitewashed walls and thatched roofs, all looking like overgrown cottages, and reminding one more of French villages than of anything Dutch. Yet many Boers live here, and one hears a great deal of Dutch spoken. There was a certain lightness and brightness about the place, to which a brilliant blue sky added all its charm. Indeed, given a blue sky and sparkling atmosphere, and what place will not charm you? One felt that life here must be very primitive but very pleasant; full of a simplicity which takes one back many generations in the world's history; but which is after all the true and wholesome life we were intended to lead, and in which most happiness will be found.

We turned into one of these wide roads, which was utterly deserted. Not a sound disturbed the stillness of this apparently abandoned village. One wondered what had become of the inhabitants and what they were doing. Yet it is a place of some importance. It has its university; and students come to it from all parts of the Colony. Therefore many professors have here taken up their abode, and form a small, learned, and very pleasant society.

Our introduction was to Mr. N., minister of the Dutch Reformed Church. We were not sure of our way, yet no one crossed our path of whom to inquire. But at the upper part of the road we came to a house which looked a formidable government office; one of those combinations apparently of Police Station—if such an institution can be required in this earthly paradise—receiving of taxes, registering of births, marriages and deaths, and other needs of the parish, domestic, legal and political. No sound was audible excepting the loud ticking of no doubt a very Dutchlike but unseen clock, and the soothing murmurs of apparently some sleeping but equally unseen functionary. In a room to the right we found a very polite official dozing at a very severe-looking table, where no doubt the Parish Councils are held and business is transacted to the satisfaction of the Parish Councillors.

He roused himself at once and asked our pleasure.

"Pray excuse me, sirs," he said. "The day is warm, and I fell asleep and dreamed I was filling in a matrimonial certificate. Perhaps you require me to do something of the sort for you, sir," turning to me. "Or more probably for this gentleman," turning to

H., "as being the younger. Though I don't know. They say young fools are not the greatest of fools, though whether this is a quotation from Solomon or Shakespeare I have never been able to find out. Or perhaps," hurrying on, "you wish to see me in some other department of my duties—I am equally at your service. But I must tell you that I'm only a novice here—a *locum-tenens* for the day, and don't know much about the routine of the place. My friend, whom I represent, has gone to Cape Town, to a wedding—not his own. A lady came in just now for a Baptismal Certificate, and I unfortunately handed her a Burial. Very awkward!"

By this time we were a little alarmed, fearing the official mind had given way under stress of work or weather. Seizing the opportunity of a pause evidently meant for "breathing time," we assured this imaginative gentleman that we wanted nothing more important than to be directed to Mr. N.'s house. This was soon done. Sundry turnings to right and left would land us at our destination. We thanked our polite official, and as we passed through the hall, the Dutch clock seemed to tick more loudly than ever. Our "director" bowed us out, and we left him bowing upon the doorstep. The waving trees opposite seemed to bow back to him, as if they took the quiet attention to themselves.

The wide roads were so many avenues of magnificent trees, most of them oak-trees, and they give to Stellenbosch a unique and charming appearance. Detached houses stood far back behind them, each with its own large fruit and flower garden.

We passed Mr. N.'s church, a plain and simple building, after the fashion of most South African churches, and reached his house, which stood in a modest nook; whilst near it was a magnificent avenue of trees, evidently outside the precincts of the town, for no houses were visible on either side. Not very far from Mr. N.'s house was the college or school for younger boys, overshadowed by a splendid oak-tree 200 years old. We were fortunate enough to find the minister at home. The previous day or the day after would have found him absent, and we should have missed what I doubt not will prove one of our pleasantest days in South Africa. Events do not always fall out as happily.

Yes, Mr. N. was at home; would we trouble to walk in, was the answer to our inquiry. And forthwith we were ushered into a sitting-room, which proved at once that we were in South Africa, and not in England, from all the South African curiosities that were scattered about. Not exactly stuffed lions and tigers, for Mr. N. is a man of peace, but smaller and more gentle specimens of the productions of the colony.

Presently Mr. N. appeared. He had been working in his garden, and was dressed more as a son of Adam than as a minister, with blue blouse and large wooden shoes. This only proves how primitive and delightfully simple life still is out here. The apology

given for appearing in such a costume was not needed. It was a new experience to find so much wit and learning under this simple garb, and seemed to put us back a century or two in the world's history.

"You see," said Mr. N., "we all work in our own gardens here: those, at least, who have leisure: and it is only such men as the doctors, and a few of the professors who cannot devote a good deal of their time to the pursuit of Adam. To me it is both profit and recreation: it keeps me in health, and what I cannot actually do with my own hands, I superintend. We depend very much upon our gardens; and everything grows so abundantly that we cannot use a tithe of what we receive from mother earth. Whilst I dig and prune I think over next Sunday's sermon."

"But you live in a garden of Eden," I observed, "where sermons ought not to be wanted. The very trees that overshadow your roads are unrivalled, and would furnish oak enough to build an English navy."

"They may some day be wanted for a South African navy," returned Mr. N., laughing. "The day will come when we shall be a great and a rich country, exposed to neighbouring eyes. Envious glances will be cast upon us, and foreign powers may try to wrest our inheritance from us. Then our 'hearts of oak' must come in and do their duty."

"Heaven forbid that such trees should ever fall in such a cause!"

"As a minister of the gospel and a man of peace, I agree with you," returned Mr. N. "I hate all wars and rumours of wars; and the day will assuredly come when there will be an end of nation fighting against nation. I don't refer to the millennium, which is probably a distant event, but to an altered condition of the world. It is changing every day, though not in all things for the better, one must admit. But there will come a time when war will be impossible; the sword and the battle-axe must give place to the ploughshare and the pruning-hook."

"In that day the lion is to lie down with the lamb," I said. "But what remains of your South African lions are still very far from being tamed, if we may believe the records of travellers."

"You are getting on too fast," laughed the minister, "and have reached the millennium; but there is much to be done in the meantime. First tame mankind, the animal world will follow."

"In that case there is also much to be done in the fighting way in South Africa," I said. "Your savage tribes must be subdued: and in their way they seem brave and warlike."

"A courage that soon evaporates," replied Mr. N. "Like everything else they soon yield to the stronger power. I see rocks ahead, and before long there will be fighting in Matabeleland. Lobengula will give trouble, and the conflict must come. How soon it may

AVENUE NEAR CAPE TOWN.

be, I do not know ; but if we take them in the right way, it will be a short and easy victory." *

"These savage tribes are one of the mysteries of the world. But no doubt they have been subdued and civilised."

"Reflection would seem to convince us that the world is yet in its infancy," returned Mr. N. "It would appear that little has been done in comparison with what has to be done. And yet we do not know. Our ways are not as the ways of Heaven. For some reasons and from many signs about us, it would not be a calamity if we were approaching the last days. That we are really doing so is very problematical."

"In the meantime you live a glorious life here," I said. "I have seldom seen a spot so charming, and I could almost pitch my tent amongst you."

The minister shook his head. "I fear the charm would soon wear off," he replied. "After the civilised world of Europe, the great world of London, with its infinite intellectual resources, you would find us here but a 'sleepy hollow,' in which you might vegetate, but not live."

"There are great compensations," I objected, "and you must have very pleasant society amongst your professors. The whole place seemed full of a quiet charm, as we came through it: a town of avenues, in which the houses play only a secondary part. The air is sparkling and delicious, your mountains are wonderful, and the blue of your clear skies seems to envelope them."

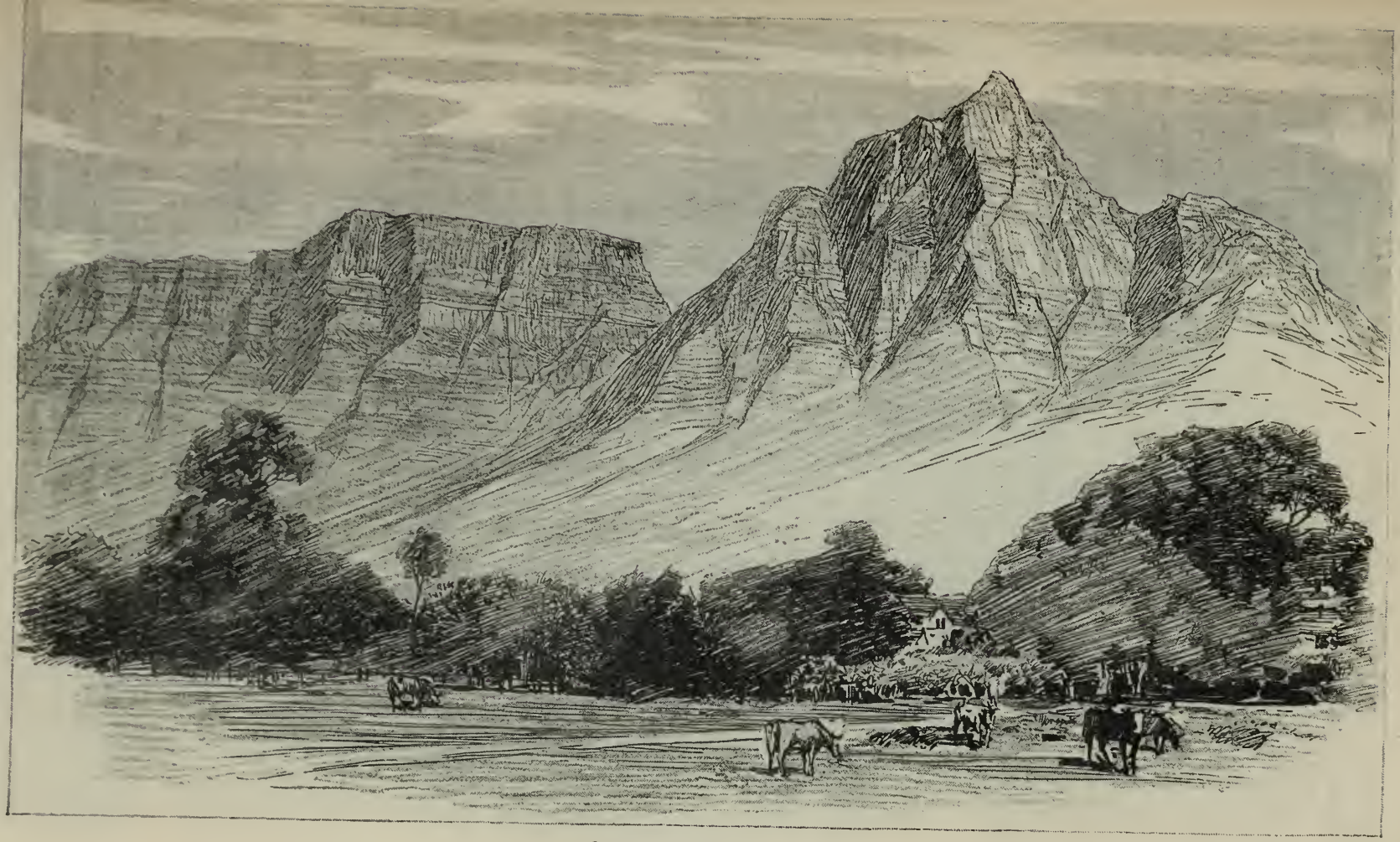
"I fear we grow used to these simple charms," said the minister, "and do not notice them. Familiarity breeds not contempt but indifference. Yet the beauties of our atmosphere are remarkable, and I never tire of watching the changes and various moods of nature. We must go out, and I will show you the small lions of Stellenbosch. We do not roar very loudly."

At this moment his daughter appeared with a tray, and herself handed round tea, still carrying on the primitive simplicity which ruled this far-away home. Another custom with which we were unfamiliar, this dispensing of the cheering cup at eleven o'clock in the morning. It was all in good keeping with the surroundings.

"I must not go abroad in this costume," said the minister, looking down with quiet humour upon his blouse and wooden shoes. "It is scarcely clerical, though I am never happier than when wearing it, for then I am at work in my beloved garden."

He disappeared, and soon returned, so transformed in orthodox black coat and clerical collar that we did not know him again: whilst the wooden shoes were exchanged for ordinary boots. The dress, now more in accordance with one's usual ideas and experience,

* Recent events have proved how correct Nr. N. was in his views. His quiet life, full of thought and contemplation, helped him to "a right judgment in all things."



STELLENBOSCH.

was not half so picturesque as the garb which had reminded one of primeval days.

We went forth and spent a delicious hour or two wandering about the charming and endless avenues. The very air was perfumed with the subtle scents of nature. Everything spoke of a grave and quiet repose. In our walks, from first to last we did not meet six people. We visited the University, which seems complete in every department, and especially strong in science. There was an admirable laboratory and lecture room, and its professors are men of learning and renown. Here come students from all parts of the Colony, and education is excellent and inexpensive: very much, I think, upon the lines of some of the universities abroad, where so many of limited means are able to fight their way through the curriculum of a college education.

From the college windows there was a wonderful view over rich and cultivated gardens, and plains backed by the magnificent mountains, where a good deal of sport may be had. The light and sparkling air seemed to throw a bloom upon everything, and minute objects became distinctly visible. Here and there a house of more importance than its neighbours stood out, cool, white and refined; but an air of primitive simplicity was everywhere the predominant element: the key-note of the place.

The knowledge that education is the chief object of Stellenbosch undoubtedly adds to its subtle charm. One felt surrounded by a small colony of learned and intellectual men, and life passes in a quiet and cultivated dream. Greater repose could not be imagined: a peace in which men should never grow old or weary; where the moral atmosphere should match the intellectual perfection: where the problems that disturb the outer world should never enter; where religious doubts and controversies should have no part, but all should be eloquent of divine revelations and ordering: sermons in stones, books in the running brooks, and good in everything. Here a millennium should reign. But alas, the Canaanite is still in the land; and as into the very cells of convents and monasteries the old Adam will find its way, so no doubt the intellectual and moral atmosphere of Stellenbosch is occasionally charged with electricity, and men are too often reminded that they are human.

But to-day we only saw their better side and higher influence: the effect of Stellenbosch was that of a living pastoral; a dream of peace and beauty; a Garden of Eden without the serpent; a Paradise without temptation.

It was a delightful walk, made still more so by the minister's interesting conversation, which was full of anecdotes of his past life, and of many an adventure in his journeyings in South Africa. Finally we paid a visit to the simple Dutch Church: and when at the minister's request we ascended the pulpit for the sake of studying the effect of the building from that exalted pinnacle, and he laughingly suggested that I should turn preacher and he become congregation, I felt that

my text would have to be one descriptive of Eden before the fall, when the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge was yet unplucked, and "all was piety and all was peace."

Neither text nor sermon came forth; learning becomes me more

STELLENBOSCH.

than teaching; and the minister might well have greeted my coming down with "Physician, heal thyself." But something told me that if we exchanged places, I should carry away with me a memorable sermon.

The hour for the midday meal was approaching: it is dinner-

time in this simple nook of earth, and we all knew better than to fail in punctuality.

So we presently found ourselves seated at the festive board; the minister and his good and amiable wife, who seemed to have imbibed all the gentle and reposeful atmosphere of Stellenbosch, and whose face was in itself as good as any sermon that was ever preached: the minister and his wife, I say, sat side by side at the head of their long table. He might have been a patriarch of old looking down upon the long double row of happy faces of children and grandchildren: and that wonderful Promise unconsciously rose up in the memory and seemed especially applicable to him: "Blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee." Again we were assisting at a pastoral, set to harmonies which needed no instrument to interpret them. They were in the air, and they penetrated to the soul. One felt that here was the true life that should be lived upon the earth: simplicity of taste, earnestness of aim; a frugal abundance: "they that had little lacked nothing, and they that had much had nothing over." Such lives are holy and wholesome, or at least may easily be made so. In the outer world all this charm and simplicity is impossible: the ignoble aims of fashion and custom are for ever striving for a greater display instead of a higher ideal. Wealth and luxury and ease—these are not the ambitions of such a home as this Dutch Manse, of which it was our privilege that day to form a part.

Presently we adjourned to the garden, where a great deal of the minister's heart was to be found, and in which he passes many hours of his life.

It was an ideal garden; large and fertile; useful as well as ornamental: full of wonderful blooms and tropical plants, and amazing fruit trees. An abundance of fruit of the choicest description, sufficient to supply their wants all the year round, if man could live on fruit alone. Much of it is made into delicious preserve. The fruit season was nearly over, but there was still sufficient to prove the beauty and quality of what had been.

We sat under the shadow of large trees, and the sunshine pouring down, traced the moving glinting leaves about our feet, and made wonderful pictures. It was an ideal experience just as it was an ideal garden.

The air was laden with the scent of many fruits. One of Mr. N.'s sons went about and brought us an "aftermath" of rich grapes, the very last of the season; a huge dishful of lovely muscatels; and we were supposed not to cease our labours until the dish was emptied. One of the ladies flitted about from path to path, and finally appeared laden with gorgeous flaming blooms; flowers that presently adorned the drawing-room and made it more beautiful than a room furnished with the choicest antiquities.

Some of the trees bore apples, the largest we had ever seen; whilst on smaller apples was a bloom more beautiful and perfect than

anything ever found on the most carefully watched hot-house grapes in England, or the most luscious peaches. Nothing filled us with greater wonder and delight than this extraordinary bloom upon the apples. It was a new experience reserved for the fruit and climate of South Africa.

And once more, in this garden of Eden, we felt what a wonderful industry was in store for this new country in the near future: what boundless fruit-growing possibilities were here; how district after district may become one huge vineyard, one great orchard. Imagine, for a moment, mile after mile of country all abloom in the spring-time; showers of pink and white blossom falling under the clearest of blue skies, the most rarefied atmosphere; the ground for many a day's ride nothing but a carpet of pink and white petals. It is a picture difficult to realise, and yet it is not only within the bounds of possibility, but it will be almost a sin if it does not come to pass.

It will come to pass; for as labour and occupation become more and more difficult, the battle of life more keen, and competition grows stronger, new fields of industry must be opened up, and here will be found one of the most paying and one of the most charming of resources. Life to those so engaged will pass as a happy dream. Century after century has rolled away, and South Africa has been unknown, unappreciated; but it has bided its time, and it will now become one of the great countries of the twentieth century. And it is high time that a new country was opened up to solve some of the hopeless problems that are staring the old world in the face, and have led to so many questions to which as yet no answer has been found.

Emigration must be the hope of the future. Hitherto Europe has been the civilised world; the world of capital, of industry, and of population; but the day is approaching when these advantages must be more evenly scattered over the earth. We know not the Divine purpose, and it may be that the world is yet in its infancy. It would almost seem so, when we consider how large a portion of the globe is still almost untrodden by man. Four centuries ago America was unknown, and four centuries hence, the very deserts of Africa may teem with large towns and flourishing industries.

But this is wandering from the minister's garden, where we spent two or three such happy hours that they will ever be memorable.

Everything that was beautiful surrounded us; the perfume of fruits filled the air, mingling subtily with the scent of many a sweet-smelling flower. Plums and figs and apples still hung from many a branch, and the warmth of the sun brought out all their delicate flavour. Beyond the garden and across the plains uprose the wonderful mountains, upon which also a purple bloom seemed to hover. Their curious and beautiful outlines were sharply defined against the clear sky, and many a pass might be traced, stretching beyond sight into unknown regions. The minister enlivened the

hours by many an anecdote of his South African experiences: a new world to us, and therefore bringing new pictures before us with all the charm of freshness about them. They were golden moments spent in this golden sunshine, with all the lovely tracery of leaves and branches in sunlight and shadow about our path, and the purest of sparkling air carrying our voices to the far-off hills.

"It is an ideal life that you live here," I said. "I could find it in my heart to remain amongst you for ever, as I have already remarked. Surely you could never leave it?"

"Yes," replied the minister, "I could; at the call of duty I could leave it to-morrow. I do not wish to leave it; all my heart is here, all my affections; some of my children are settled here; but if the call came, I should respond to it."

I fear I could never be so brave.

When the time came for leaving, we felt as though we had known the minister for years instead of hours, and were parting from an old friend. I could not have conceived so much regret accompanying our farewell; but we knew that we were probably turning our backs for ever upon Stellenbosch, and it was more than likely we should see the face of our kindly and hospitable friend no more. It is the unexpected which happens, you will say, but in these rapid days, for which life is far too short, we shall probably never again return to South Africa, once we have parted from its shores. And you who urged me never to come here at all would certainly never counsel a second visit.

Thus sorrow was mingled with our good-bye. Pleasure and pain for ever go hand in hand. There are not many earthly paradises, or it has not been our lot to meet with them. But circumstances give their colouring to everything; and no doubt Stellenbosch would not have made so great an impression upon us without the geniality of the minister, the simplicity, repose and harmony of his home.

As we returned to Cape Town we mused and pondered over the day's delightful and exceptional experience, and wished that it might repeat itself on the morrow. Would it have been as charming, as full of the nameless and subtle atmosphere which breathed contentment to our minds and peace to our souls? No; these exceptional days and experiences never quite repeat themselves; the first draught of champagne is the most sparkling, the first pressure of the grape the sweetest.

We could not put the matter to the test, for that same night, at 10 o'clock, the *Dunottar* moved away from her moorings, and steadily, and with all the dignity of a monarch amongst ships, went down the harbour and passed through the lock gates into the open sea.

Once more we are travelling westward. To-morrow morning, all being well, we shall reach Port Elizabeth, where we land, make our

way by train to Grahamstown, spend there a quiet Sunday, and on Monday proceed onwards to East London by mail cart, a style of South African travelling to which we have yet to pay our tribute.

What that experience will prove must be the subject of another letter. For the moment we are surrounded by a lovely waste of wide blue waters. The vessel has become more yachtlike in appearance, for comparatively few passengers are on board, and, alas, our dear Mrs. S. is amongst the absent ones. We miss her calm beautiful face at every turn; and in vain I await her daily morning visit on the bridge. The monsters of the deep now and then come and look at us—a distant whale blows a spout of water into the air, and with a contemptuous lash of his tail sails away to other seas. Dolphins we see occasionally, and porpoises without number. The skies are glorious. The long low line of the South African Coast is ever in view; sometimes rocky and barren, but more often green, with valleys stretching far away inland, here and there blazing out in a huge prairie fire, very startling and effective at night. And again there are dark patches, which are nothing but endless forests, all waiting to be utilised, all crying out for man to come and clear the ground and cultivate the earth. Our present experience is the pleasantest part of the voyage; full of delight and repose and an ever-changing panorama.

To-morrow morning this letter will be dropped into the Port Elizabeth Post Office. It will traverse the wide seas and in due time reach your hands. It sends you a greeting—accord it a welcome. And now the tiffin bell rings, and I suppose the summons has to be obeyed. Once more, my heart says to you—*Adieu jusqu'au revoir.*

ON A SILVER BEECH IN SPRING-TIME.

Like some fair maiden's hanging graceful head,
As though abashed at her own loveliness,
Thou seem'st to stand, robed in thy dainty dress
Of freshest green, which Spring has lightly shed.
A lace-like veil o'er drooping branches spread,
While gleaming bright between each waving tress,
Tossed to and fro beneath the wind's caress,
Thy silver bark shows like a silver thread.
Fair queen of trees! a type thou surely art
Of gracious womanhood, calm and serene,
'Mid ruder forest growths thou tak'st thy part,
Refinement shedding o'er the woodland scene.
The oak and elm may stouter be of heart,
But o'er them all thou reignest still as Queen.

E. M. Alford.

RENT DAY.

By Mrs. Stephen Batson, Author of "Dark: a tale of the Down Country."

IT was a pretty little old woman who sat by her hearthstone one gusty October evening, when the rain fell in great swirling sheets in the garden court outside, and the wind howled in the shaky lattice of the window-frames. There was not much fire in the wide grate, for she could ill afford to buy fuel. She picked up a few scattered sticks in the neighbouring park nearly every morning, and they served to warm her through the long winter, and to boil her kettle three times a day in the summer. Alas! that kettle now was to provide her, for a week to come, with the main part of her scanty meals, for the yearly rent day had arrived, and all her little fortune was to go to her landlord. Bread, moistened with hot water in her old blue basin, and sweetened with a little sugar, would be her breakfast and her supper for seven days to come, and, with a handful of vegetables from her garden, would furnish her also with seven frugal dinners.

She was a widow, and childless. If sons had remained alive to her, the Union authorities would have compelled them to contribute to her maintenance. But they were all dead, many years ago, and the guardians allowed her two shillings a week and a loaf of bread wherewith to maintain life in her poor old body as she best might compass with their dole. All through the year she had saved sixpence from her weekly income, and had hidden them all away in an old cracked teapot, toward the inevitable rent day. But even so she had but twenty-six shillings with which to meet the steward of the estate she lived on; the whole of the little dole received that morning from the relieving officer had gone, too, to join the smaller coins in the bottom of the great teapot which had served her large family fifty years before, when they sat round the tea-table, and cried for food as hungry children will. They were gone now, but the teapot remained as a receptacle for all her worldly wealth; some one had given her a smaller one for her own solitary use of late years, and she had no need for this old friend in its original capacity.

She was nearly eighty years old, and her face was lined and corrugated with a hundred wrinkles. She wore a white cap with a closely quilled border, and looked as fresh and dainty as any lady in the land. Her dark, grey linsey gown had lasted her for best over a dozen years, and had lately been taken of necessity into common every-day wear; it had been many a time through the wash-tub, and was patched and darned with the extremest care and economy. Over it a blue checked apron covered one of white flax, and was removed

only when company came to see her, to reveal the dazzling cleanliness of the under "pinner." Her room, too, was spotlessly clean, and the red bricks shone brightly in the firelight. On the table by her side stood a dip candle which she would quickly light if any neighbour came to pay her a visit; the evenings were growing long, and she could not afford to burn a candle from twilight to bedtime, so she sat by the embers, and thought, and the candle was ready for any sudden need.

She got up after a time and went to the great grandfather clock which stood against the wall, and read the hour with her sharp eyes, and then sat down again in the wooden elbow-chair, which had been her dead husband's favourite seat.

"Six o'clock," she said to herself, for she often spoke aloud for the feeling of company which it suggested—"Six o'clock, an' gettin' on fur hafe paist, an' her ent come yet. Oh Lar'! oh Lar'! I be gettin' so trembly; my heart be a-gallopin' in he's socket a good-un. But her wunt desaive ma—I knaws it, thank the Lard. But still I be gettin' ter'ble trembly—th' Almighty forgie ma fur distrustin' of Un, an' of her, too, as never desaived ma yet."

Even as she spoke a quick, light step came up the garden court through the stormy night, and a sharp knock rang out in the still lane.

"Come in—come in, my dear," cried the old lady, hobbling to the door, and setting it wide open to admit her visitor in a seemly manner, "come in, an' set down—why, 'tis only Tom Eddards arter all!"

A diminutive boy, whose appearance gave the lie to his age, which was well known to be far advanced in the teens, entered, and sat down in the elbow-chair. The old dame blew out the candle she had lighted for his mistress; what did Tom Edwards need of so great an honour?

Tom Edwards was the garden boy at the Rectory; he was a very inportant person in his own eyes, and a good boy too, but she could not waste dip candles on the likes of him.

He sat down now with an air of more than ordinary importance, and wiped the rain and the perspiration together from his dripping brow with the cuff of his coat sleeve.

"Lar' bless 'ee, Mrs. Dowling," he said, "'tis cluttery weather, an' no mistake. Fight my way up your path I did, though I baint so easy to upset, neither."

The garden boy expanded his little chest, and tried to look like a full-blown gardener; but he failed lamentably, for he was so very small and weak to look at.

"Dear, dear," said Mrs. Dowling in a half absent manner, while her eyes still searched the darkness beyond the lattice, "an' you've a-bin sent wi' a arrand, I'll war'nt, an' the missis baint a-comin' out to see ma to-night."

"The missis," said the garden boy with an air of authority, "is wheer she'd ought to ha' bin all this blessed day—in her bed. The Rector sent she to't half an hour since, wi' a cough fit to tear the house down. But don't you be afeard, Mrs. Dowling; she ain't forgot you."

"Her never desaived ma yet, an' her wun't desaive ma now," replied Mrs. Dowling, with the conviction born of twenty years of confidence.

"Out all the marnin' she were, in the pony cart, a-gwine to the furdest folks as couldn't come to she. Seven widders we saw afore dinner-time; I baint a-tellin' no lie, fur I went wi' her to hold the pony, an' I counted 'em. Lar' bless 'ee, my dear soul, she coughed fit to turn the cart over two or three times. I'd a mind, more'n wunst, to tell her to come home, but 'tis a headstrong seck, an' obstinit, an' I didn't."

The garden boy was valiant in his words when he could trust his audience; but in manner and appearance, when he drove out with his mistress, he was a most exemplary groom, playing his part with studied imitation of the head footman at the Hall. Nothing could disturb his conventional repose save only one thing. He was a passionate lover of sport, as, in his own small way, he was acquainted with its joys; if a hare or a rabbit, a partridge or a pheasant appeared anywhere between the pony-cart and the horizon, his little arms would unfold, and a small finger would be stretched out towards the furred or feathered creature away in the distance, while a piping voice that strove in vain to be deep and manly would call his mistress's attention to the quarry with a single word.

"Rabbut!" he would exclaim, or, if need were, "Purtridge!" or whatever name the thing that had attracted his attention might own; and then he would subside once more into his attitude of studied apathy. This was the one habitual lapse from decorum of the garden boy in his relations with his mistress, and Mrs. Dowling knew better than to credit him with the bad manners he confessed to having been very nearly guilty of.

"Lar,' my dear," she cried, "an' I a-lookin' for her this cruel night!"

"We've a-hed the house full all the arternoon," continued Tom Edwards—"leastways the parish room, however. What wi' onions here, an' pertaters thur, an' 'Tom, carry this yer baskut out to Hallett,' or 'Tom, tell Martha to find a shelf in the storeroom for these apples,' it hev bin a hard day fur me as well as fur she. I be a strong fellow, as you knows, Mrs. Dowling," expanding his chest again, and, with a fierce frown, challenging contradiction, "but sacks an' bushel baskuts begin to tell on ma."

"Was there so many up at Rectory then, Tom?"

"Well-nigh a score, fust an' last, an' all wi' summat to sell to help wi' their rent to-morrer. Why, my dear soul, her knaws to a T which be they as needs money, an' she'd given 'em the order, months back,

to come an' see her the day before rent day. But I did larf when Shady Joyce come in wi' a clothes baskut o' apples, an' set 'em down on the floor as bold as brass."

"That drinkin' scoundrel—never!"

"A did, however, an' I wunt tell 'ee no lie. Spoke out too, a did, a good-un. 'Yur be dree bushel, ma'am,' a said, in he's common way o' talkin', 'at vower shillin' a bushel, but you shall hae the lot fur hafe a suv'ren.'

"'You be martly mistook, Shedruck,' says the missis, 'fur I baint agwine to hae 'em at all. I didn't ax you to bring 'em,' her said. 'Lar', ma'am,' says he, 'I brought 'em,' says he, 'because I ain't made up my rent. 'Tis fur Squire's rent day to-morrer I wants the money,' says he, ''tis him as wants it, however, an' I wunt desaive 'ee—I ent got enough,' a says. 'You be tellin' truth thur, Shedruck,' says the missis; ''tis Squire as wants it, but 'tis the Dun Cow as 'ould get it, if so be I was to buy your apples.'

"Ah, her talks straight, do Mrs. Curtis—straight an' honest. Ther be them as don't hold wi' her manner o' talkin', but I allus spakes up fur she. Her barks, but her don't bite, I says. ''Tis the Dun Cow as 'ould get it,' says she! That be as true a word as ever was spoke.

"So Shady up's wi's baskut, an' reels as fur as grunsel, fur he'd had a drop, Shed had; an' a says, says he, 'If you wunt help ma,' a says, 'ther be one above as I can trust to. Th' Almighty wunt desert ma,' says he. 'You be mistook again, Shedruck,' says the missis, 'if you looks to th' Almighty to do fur 'ee what you'd ought to do fur yourself. I wunt buy your apples when there be many pore an' deservin' as wants the money, but I'll give you a five pun' note, willin',' her says, 'if you'll pint out one thing to ma.' 'What be that?' says Shed, eager-like. 'If you can pint out a teetotaller in this yer parish as ever wanted fur anything,' says the missis. So Shady he outs wi's baskut, fur he couldn't find nowt to say, an' goes off to the Dun Cow, an' sells his apples fur a gallon o' beer."

The garden boy was groping in the depths of his trousers pockets, while he recounted the demolition of Shadrach Joyce, and he produced from one of them a strip of paper which he laid on the table.

"Shall us light the candle?" he asked.

The candle was lighted, and the paper was spread out before Mrs. Dowling's puzzled eyes. It was a cheque for a small sum, and Tom proceeded to explain its meaning.

"When the Rector sends missis to bed, her turns to me an' axes ma to come an' see you, an' tell you how 'tis her couldn't come down. 'But I wunt disappint her,' says she, 'fur I promised her should hae it to-night, an' hae it her shall. Tom 'ool see to't as well as ever I could,' says she. So, if you please you be to let us hae what pertaters you wants to sell to make up the rent, an' you can return the change out o' this yer to missis, next time her comes down."

"What be't, Tom?" cried the old woman, trembling. "Oh, Lard! what be thic thur thing?"

"A cheque," replied Tom, with some slight scorn. "Ain't you never seen a cheque afore?"

"Never—the Lard be praised. I've yeerd o' they as hev' bin sent to prison fur meddlin' wi' them things. But what do it say, my dear?"

"I'll rade un to 'ee. 'Pay to Eliza Dowling, or bearer, the sum of one pound (£1). Signed, Frances Curtis.' How much hev you got a'ready fur the rent?"

"Twenty-eight shillin'."

"Then you wants twelve shillin' more. If you lets us hae two sacks o' pertaters that'll be right, an' you can return the eight shillin' to missis arter the steward's give you the change fur the cheque."

"But what be I to do wi' thiccy paper, my dear?"

"Pay your rent wi't," reiterated Tom impatiently.

"Oh Lawks, oh deary me! Oh, I be so frowtened!"

"Frowtened—'cause you've a got the money you wants!"

"If so be '*tis* the money, Tom, but it don't sim like 't, an' I knows them as hev' bin sent to prison fur——"

"Do you think as I be desaivin' on 'ee?" cried Tom with an attempt at great sternness.

"No, my dear—no, my dear, never—nor the missis neither; but it makes I tremble, Tom."

"Well there 'tis, anyway, an' the steward wunt make no objection to't, I'll go bail. Wishin' you good evenin', Mrs. Dowling, fur my tea be a-waitin' for ma this hafe hour."

Tom went down the garden path with as firm and loud a step as he could command, and Mrs. Dowling was left with the cheque outspread on the table before her.

From motives of economy she blew out the candle directly the boy had left the cottage, and for quite a quarter of an hour she sat in the glimmering firelight beside the awful Thing. There it lay on the table, a kind of pale ghost on the dark wood; and over and over again her eyes were attracted to it sorely against her will as it lay there. After a little time she bent down to the embers and lighted the candle once more.

"I caint sit in the dark wi't," she murmured to herself. "The Old Un med tempt ma wi't, or summat. There was Jack Brown as got locked up fur meddlin' wi' writin's. Oh, deary, deary me!"

She sat for a long time, the candle wasting itself out as the evening drew on. After a long interval she got up from her chair, and went to the little shelf near the door, and reached down the great family Bible.

"I'll put the Book on the thing," she muttered; "mebbe it 'ool hinder it from workin' mischief."

At eight o'clock a quick tramp came up the path, and the latch was lifted by an impetuous hand. A young man of ruddy counte-

nance and bucolic appearance strode into the little kitchen, and his burly frame and cheerful face seemed to fill the room immediately. He was a fine young fellow, and his position in life was at the plough tail; no one could turn a furrow so well or so evenly as honest Jim Dowling."

"Good evenin', aunt," he said in his loud, hearty way.

"Good evenin', Jim," said she in a voice more than common tremulous, "'tis main thankful I be to see 'ee, my dear."

"There be summat wrong, baint a?" asked Jim Dowling, looking hard into the old woman's face which was working with emotion.

And then the whole story came out. How the Rector's wife had promised to help her as usual with her rent by buying what garden stuff she could best spare; how Tom Edwards had brought some mysterious Thing which was to stand for payment of the potatoes; how martly afraid she was of it, for she had known those who had been sent top rison for meddling with writings:—and she ended her story with an agitated appeal to Jim for his advice in her trouble.

Urged by his aunt, Jim removed the Book in a tentative and uncertain way, and putting it down on one side disclosed the slip of paper beneath. He placed the candle near, and read the words on the cheque aloud, spelling them out with difficulty, for it was now some eight or ten years since he had left the village school, and Jim was no scholar. In his face there was visible a great suspicion, partly held in check by an inborn feeling of confidence in the sender, who was considered in the village to be as far above suspicion as any merely mortal woman could attain to. Yet assuredly, he, too, had heard of those who had been sent to prison for meddling with cheques, and no longer ago than last year. Misgiving strove with the faith deeply rooted in his breast, and eventually gained the day.

"Aunt," he said, and his jolly red face became grave and anxious as he spoke—"Aunt, do 'ee ax my 'pinion on this yer job?"

"Yes, my dear; I caint sim to see 't right myself, nohow."

"Then what I says, be this—don't you hae no hands wi 't. That's what I says, aunt."

"But, my dear, 'tis Mrs. Curtis as sent it to ma, an' I 'ouldn't go fur to show no distrust o' she, be 't how 'twull."

"Aunt, was you a-axin' o' my 'pinion?"

"Yes, sure, my dear."

"Then, aunt, you've a-got un."

"Got what, my dear?"

"Got my 'pinion. What I says be this—don't you hae no hands wi 't."

"But 'tis Mrs. Curtis as sent un to ma. Her 'ouldn't do no wrong to I."

"Mebbe not," replied Jim, but with reserve.

"Then I'd ought to do as her says, Jemps."

"I thought you axed my 'pinion, aunt," returned Jim with an air of studied indifference.

"So I did, so I did, an' meanin' no offence to 'ee—nor narn to she, neither," murmured the old woman.

"Then you've a-got un," returned her nephew in a tone of finality.

"But why, why, my dear? I knaws I caint trust the thing, but I don't feel no sort o' raison in't, Jemps."

"Raisons be fur them as don't knaw. *I knaws.* I don't offer no raison, though I lay I could find 'ee one afore long if I had a mind to 't. What I says be as you'd best hae no hands wi 't. I don't say as it'll bring 'ee trouble; I don't say as them sart o' things be agen religion, nor yet agen sense, though I likes to see my money when I've a-yarned un, an' I 'ouldn't never be put off wi' no sech rubbage as this yer. I don't say nowt agen it, but I says, an' I says it plain, aunt—don't 'ee hae no hands wi 't. I don't tell 'ee as bad 'ould come on 't, fur I don't knaw, but there be some things as be best left alone, an' this yer be one on 'em."

"Then I'll lave it alone, Jim," cried Mrs. Dowling with some firmness, yet with a sorrowful yearning for the money, "an' Mr. Pearce must trust ma till I can see Mrs. Curtis."

"No, aunt; you've a-hed your rent ready all these years, an' you'll hae it ready now. I hed a suv'ren saved up to buy ma a pair o' boots, an' I was gwine to town to-morrer wi' Polly to get em; but you shall hae twelve shillin' o' mine till you can see Mrs. Curtis or the Rector, an' Polly an' me'll go another day."

And so it was arranged. Jim went home and got four half-crowns and a florin from his little store, and added them to the contents of the teapot. Moreover, at his aunt's entreaty he carefully and solemnly picked up the cheque, and laid it between the leaves of the Book, well in towards the binding so that no part of it might be visible. Then the Book was placed reverently on its shelf, and Mrs. Dowling took the teapot upstairs, and hid it under her bed for the night, and in the morning she was the first of the Squire's tenants to meet the steward, and pay the rent of her cottage and garden.

Three days after, hearing that Mrs. Curtis was recovered from her cold, and able once more to see her visitors, she toddled up the hill to the Rectory, and rang the bell of the Parish Room, which was always answered by the Rector himself, or by his wife.

Mrs. Curtis came out with a shawl round her thin shoulders, and made her sit down by the fire, and sent for a cup of tea for her visitor, and tried to still her nervous trembling. It was not often that Mrs. Dowling was able to climb that steep hill. Presently the old woman recovered herself a little, and began to search in the deep pocket of her under-skirt, producing from it at last a white handkerchief neatly folded. Inside the handkerchief there was a large piece of newspaper, also folded in a long, narrow parcel, and within the paper lay the cheque, unused and unsoiled.

"But what is this?" cried Mrs. Curtis, as the scrap of paper lay outspread before her wondering eyes, "why didn't you use the money —didn't you want it?"

"Oh, my dear, my dear," said her visitor, trembling again very exceedingly, and crying partly, and partly laughing, "don't 'ee be angered wi' ma, I prays of 'ee. I didn't rightly understand the Thing, an' I couldn't sim to want to hae no hands wi 't, an' our Jim lent ma the money till you was well enough to see ma; an' oh, I thank the Lard that I've a-got un out o' my house at laist. Th' Almighty was allus ter'ble good to me, and I be main thankful to Un for ahl He's mercies."

"OUR NAN."

Ah! she has crossed the briny deep a thousand times, I ween,
To linger in the meadow-lands of never-fading green;
At sunrise, 'midst the silence of the everlasting snow,
She climbs the highest Alpine peak to catch the roseate glow,
That flits across the glaciers to the cataract below.

Ay! not a quaint old city near the golden Zuyder Zee,
But our sweet maid with busy foot has tripped away to see;
And there she spends the live-long hours, as happy as the day,
Though she beyond her village home has never been away.

Sometimes she sets forth gaily, ere the wintry day is done,
Along the glittering path of rays of golden-setting sun;
Upon the wingèd wind to flit above the crimson west,
Until, amidst the stars serene, she drifts away to rest.

The summer days oft find her with a bucket in her hand,
In quest of prickly "urchins," or of sea-shells on the strand;
Or wandering in some woodland dell, a hundred miles from home,
Where merry brooklets splash the fern with iridescent foam.

Here she has spent the live-long hours, as happy as the day,
Though she beyond her village home has never been away;
Ay! there upon the sofa, with her crutches by her side,
The hours of pain pass gaily, as, her hobby horse astride,
"Our little Nan," on fancies' wings, the universe doth ride.

A. M. Trotter.

STRAY THOUGHTS ON STRAY CATS.

"THE house-cat is a four-legged quadruped, the legs as usuerl being at the corners. It is what is sometimes called a tame animal, though it feeds on mice and birds of prey. Its colours are striped, tortusshell, black, also black and white, and others. When it is happy it does not bark but breathes through its nose instead of its mouth. Cats also mow, which you have all heard. Cats have nine liveses, but which is seldom wanted in this country coz of Christianity. Cats eat meat and most anythink, speshully where you can't afford. This is all about cats."

The above is a quotation from a Board School boy's essay, taken from Mr. Barker's amusing volume. It seems to me wonderfully pithy and well expressed, and shows how clever we can be before over-education has laid its withering hand upon us.

For the subject of "cats" is a vast one! There are, it is said, over five millions of inhabitants in London; it is an awful thought when once one comes seriously to entertain it, and still more awful is it to reflect that there are certainly no less than five million cats who are dependent on the human beings aforesaid.

This is decidedly not too high a statement; for every rich man keeps at least one cat, and there being no cat tax, every poor man also keeps one, if not several; to say nothing of the ladies who, like Dame Wiggins of Lee, keeps "seven fine cats" and more. If the human race is prolific, the cat-race is certainly not less so; at least one-half of these cats have three families a year, the greater part of which either run wild, or, as M. Pierre Loti has it, are "brought up with tenderness and placed advantageously in the neighbourhood." Therefore, even allowing for the sad fate of the pail that so often awaits infant kittens, the sum of cats in London must be at least equal to that of their masters.

Five million cats! It sounds at first as alarming as Bishop Hatto's celebrated army of rats! for though a cat in the singular may be a charming pet, yet in the aggregate they do not somehow enlist our sympathies. They certainly do not enlist the sympathies of the ragged youth of their neighbourhood. Let us hope that the little essay-writer quoted above never pulled a cat's tail or helped to enrage it in any other way. It would be nice to think so, if one could, but alas! only too improbable.

Leaving little boys and their attentions, however, out of the question, it is not only old maids who care for cats; for the cat, thanks to Mdlle. Ronner, Mr. Louis Wain and other artists, is gradually rising in favour, and people are now even known to stand up in its defence.

Great writers often have a love for cats; M. Pierre Loti, the newly-elected French Academician above mentioned, holds his own up to undying fame in a pathetic story, one of the most beautiful things he has written; Mr. Pater has two lovely long-haired Persians to guard his hearth and sit at his table, and has not the charming "Elia," to go back to old times, told us that his cat was as much a beloved companion as his "faithful Bridget." To the cat in fiction, injustice is still occasionally done; for was it not the other day that the accomplished authoress of "The Silence of Dean Maitland" made a cat's life to extend over a period of twenty-five years? a thing manifestly impossible; and are not children still taught, in the language of Miss Jane or Ann Taylor, that:—

> "The dog will come when he is called,
> The cat will walk away."

Thus early do we prejudice infant minds against poor harmless, much-enduring pussy.

Mongrels of all races have always seemed to me the most interesting of their kind, perhaps because continual hardships bring out character; hence it is to these that I confine my present remarks. Living near dingy London slums I every day see pass and repass myriads of cats; a few of them happy-go-lucky wanderers, raking their daily food out of dust-bins; but the large majority, poor, mangy animals, seeking in vain for rest, and finding none. On rainy days in winter, I have often seen door-steps occupied both by old women, and sick cats, and I have pitied the cat the most; for the old woman has at least the workhouse or the casual ward to go to; neither can one accuse the cat of having brought herself to this plight, through the persuasiveness of the neighbouring gin-shop. However, it is one thing to pity a cat, and quite another to take in and feed all the houseless wanderers one sees, their name being Legion. A cat tax would improve this sad state of affairs; or, failing this, a parish lethal chamber; for it is often a kindness to put the poor things out of their misery.

As things at present are, I would have people who kill cats, in however kindly meant a spirit, take upon themselves the sole responsibility of their burial. It is unpleasant to have a poisoned cat slowly dying in agonies on your doorstep, or in front of your area railings, tortured by sundry street arabs and their stones. It is exhausting to chase away the boys, who continually return to the charge; and besides, you have finally to pay for the removal of the body, which becomes quite an expense in time. But for this there is no redress. Cats at present are held to be "wild animals," and in the eye of the law do not "belong to anybody."

The cat-tax, which would effectually reduce their numbers, would perhaps press hardly on the poor, whose chief pets they are; but if we cannot have the cat-tax, let us at any rate have the lethal chamber.

As I write a vision rises before me of a mangy, tailless black cat who haunts my area, to whom its highest spikes are but a mere plaything—a very Pariah of a cat. What good can his existence do to himself or to anyone else? and yet I do not like, on that cat's behalf alone, to imbrue my hands in murder.

But a parish lethal chamber would simplify matters. How often have I not wished that such a thing were handy! I met a poor cat once who was crawling along furtively, a piteous wounded skeleton, in dire suffering. As it looked at me sadly out of its dim bleared eyes, one would have been inhuman indeed not to take pity on it. But when I begged a passing policeman to kill it for me with a timely blow on the head, the stern guardian of the law replied, shaking his head: "Durstn't do it, ma'am! don't think of it;" as though it had been an action to be deprecated, like a theft.

I have, indeed, taken the law into my own hands on several occasions. When a poor sick cat had sat for some three weeks uncomplainingly on my doorstep, I one day called it in, warmed and fed it, then, putting it carefully into a covered basket, carried it to the chemist's. The chemist is a friend of mine and therefore consented to administer a drop of prussic acid, in the little dark room behind the shop where he usually extracted teeth. But here a fresh difficulty arose. The chemist said he could not do it alone; he must have the cat held for him. Could I do it? I shuddered at the bare idea. Fortunately at that moment a boy of tender years passed by the shop-door, humming a popular air.

"Will you," I said apologetically, "mind holding this cat while the chemist poisons him?"

The apology was needless. The boy's eyes glowed.

"Won't I just?" he said meaningly.

There was a gasp from the cat, a strong smell of prussic acid, and the boy emerged beaming, with the cat dangling by one leg.

"That's won'erful stuff," he said admiringly; "why, the cat didn't mow once!"

I gave him some pennies and he departed with the poor little corpse, I having no space to bury it in.

"What are you going to do with the body?" I asked.

"Throw 'er over the first garden-wall I come to," replied the youth with a fine indifference.

The friendly chemist has thus shortened the troubles of life for several ailing cats; it has ever been an oft-recurring item in my chemist's bill; but my old cook, Maggie, doesn't approve of this. She adores cats, and whenever I go into the kitchen I find her with at least two on her back, clawing at her cap: "The little kitties," she calls them tenderly, and besides this has christened them severally by the romantic names of Phyllis and Margery. Old Maggie says that I shall "get my name up," if I go on taking stray cats to the chemist. What "getting my name up" may be I know not, but it

sounds alarming. She goes on to say that she "don't 'old" with taking life.

"But if the creature's suffering," I argue, "it's surely a kindness to it to put it out of its misery."

Old Maggie is not convinced. "Well, we don't know," she says, "as 'ow life ain't given for some good cause—and where do we get the right from to take it?"

I have at the bottom of my heart an uncomfortable feeling that there may be something in what old Maggie says—cats may enjoy life in their way, even when sick and miserable. Are we ourselves any more anxious to die under such conditions, than was the old man of Æsop's Fables? We enjoy the pleasures of recollection: and so may cats in old age, as Calverley suggests, enjoy the thought of those blissful rambles of their youth.

> "I remember, I remember, how one night I fleeted by,
> And gained the blessed tiles and gazed into the cold clear sky;
> I remember, I remember, how my various lovers came,
> And there, beneath the crescent moon, played many a little game."

Old Maggie had certainly never been addicted to lovers herself, but for that reason she has perhaps all the more sympathy with cats' romances. "You couldn't be fonder of them if they really had souls," I was one day driven to remark.

"Well, 'm, no, I can't think as they have souls, but they thinks a deal, bless 'em, the dear little kitties!"

And I go my way pondering over Maggie's words, more than ever determined to add as far as I can to the happiness of the stray cats whose instinct may lead them to the shelter of my doorstep. Maggie would certainly offer no objection, and I have sometimes had visions of pensioning her off in her old age, and setting her up in a crèche for the poor "four-legged quadruped, whose legs as usual are at the corners."

AN INNOCENT THIEF.

By M. E. Stanley Penn.

"YES, Miss Falconer is a remarkably pretty girl, but——"

"Pretty! She is the loveliest girl I ever saw, and the sweetest!"

This emphatic declaration was uttered by my ex-ward, Reginald Dane, as we stood together, one brilliant January afternoon, on the terrace of the Casino at Monte Carlo.

He turned his back on the sea as he spoke, and faced me with a rather militant air, and his hands in his pockets.

"My dear boy, I don't deny it," I answered, pacifically, taking out my cigar-case; "she is all that is lovely and of good repute; but—she has a father." I paused impressively. "I ask you frankly—is Captain Falconer precisely the sort of man you would select for a papa-in-law?"

Reginald stared moodily at his boots, and made no reply.

"A man," I continued, deliberately, "of whom it is flattery to say that his character is doubtful, for there has long ceased to be any doubt about it. A *roué* and gambler, and worse, if report speaks truly."

"I know all that," he rejoined; "but if I married her, I should sever all connection with the Captain, you may be sure. He should never cross my threshold."

"Would Miss Falconer consent to a total separation from her only parent? She is evidently devoted to him."

"I don't know about devotion; she is very sweet and dutiful, but I fancy she has more fear than affection for him. He has an iron will."

"And an extraordinary influence over the will of others," I added. "I have felt it myself. By the way, it remains to be seen whether he will consent to the marriage."

Reginald looked at me rather blankly.

"Why, do you think there is any doubt of that? I fancied that—living the life he does—he would be rather glad to get his daughter off his hands."

"Perhaps—living the life he does—he may find her useful."

"Useful? Good heavens, Sir John, you don't mean that he uses Elsie as—as a decoy? What a horrible idea!"

"Not as a decoy, but as what the French call a *porte-respect*. The presence of a beautiful, lady-like, and irreproachable daughter gives him a sort of *cachet* of respectability which inspires confidence."

My companion was silent a moment, pulling his moustache.

"Oh, well," he said at last, looking up, "it's no use anticipating

evils. I fancy I shall be able to 'square' the Captain if he makes any difficulties. I happen to know that he is at rather a low ebb just now."

I also happened to be aware of the same fact, it having been brought to my notice, as no doubt it had to Reginald's, by a request for a loan. I might have complied with it, having the misfortune to belong to what Charles Lamb calls "the inferior race" of lenders, but for the interposition of a certain lady who is not only the partner of my joys and sorrows, but the keeper of my purse.

"No, Sir John, you will not lend Captain Falconer fifty pounds," that lady had said with decision, in the privacy of a conjugal *tête-à-tête*. "He is a dangerous and disreputable person, and if it were not for his daughter—whom I pity sincerely, poor child!—I would have nothing whatever to do with him. As it is, I wish with all my heart he was staying at another hotel."

But though she expressed her opinion of him with great vigour in private, it was noticeable that my wife was rather markedly civil to Captain Falconer in public. The fact is, there was something about the man—a suggestion of latent power—which, though it might not inspire respect, exacted politeness, even from those who disliked and distrusted him.

He was a tall, soldierly-looking man of four or five and forty, with a beak-like aquiline nose, a drooping moustache, and remarkably bright, penetrating dark eyes: "mesmeric eyes," my wife called them, and declared they had an uncanny power of reading one's thoughts.

Coming into lunch at the —— Hotel somewhat late, after my conversation with Reginald Dane above recorded, I found the usual group assembled at the end of the long *table d'hôte*; Captain Falconer next to my wife, and beyond him, his daughter, Elsie, a pretty, fair-haired, fragile-looking girl of nineteen, at whose side sat Reginald. Captain Falconer, I found, had hit upon a topic which was sure to interest my wife. He was talking of diamonds.

"I was telling Lady Rushton," he explained affably, turning to me, "that I, like herself, am something of a connoisseur in diamonds."

"And Captain Falconer says, John," she added, "that he has never seen finer stones than those in the bracelet I wore last night—the one you gave me on my last birthday."

"H'm, they ought to be good, they cost enough," I grumbled, being hungry and somewhat cross.

"They are magnificent; old Brazilian of the purest water. But, my dear Lady Rushton," he continued, "is it wise to travel with such valuable jewellery, in these days of railway robberies and hotel thieves? Nothing is more easily snapped up than a jewel-case."

"I don't carry my jewels in a case," she returned confidentially; "when we are on a journey I wear them in a belt, and at night I put the belt——"

I touched her foot under the table, and she paused.

"Yes?" the Captain said interrogatively, looking her straight in the face with his piercing dark eyes.

"I put it—" she repeated, and paused again, then, as he still looked at her steadily, she finished her sentence with a jerk, as if the words had been forced from her—"under my pillow."

"Hus—sh, my dear madam—not so loud!" he whispered warningly, glancing over his shoulder; "I fear the waiter heard you. Let us talk of something else."

When my wife and I were alone, half an hour later, she startled me by exclaiming: "John, I believe Captain Falconer is Mephistopheles in person! You heard the stupid thing I said at lunch?"

"I heard you announcing to all whom it might concern, where you put your jewels at night," I answered drily.

"Yes—was it not idiotic? I was perfectly aware of it at the time, but, do you know, Captain Falconer *forced* me to tell him. I tried to keep the words back, but his eyes seemed to wring them from me in spite of myself. Do you think—" she hesitated—"do you think he had any particular motive in asking?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I can't say, I'm sure, what his motive was," I rejoined, "but I think, on the whole, my dear, you had better find another hiding-place for your diamonds."

Now it befell that two nights after this episode I was visited by a strange dream—if dream it were; but it was uncommonly like reality. I was unusually restless that night, and for some hours after Lady Rushton had been peacefully slumbering, I tossed and turned, trying in vain to sleep.

At last I fell into a doze, in which there came to me a hazy idea that the window, which I had left half closed, was now wide open, and that something, or someone, was moving near it.

For the better understanding of what follows, I must explain that our room was on the second floor front, and adjoined Miss Falconer's chamber, on the other side of which was that occupied by Reginald Dane. Captain Falconer slept on the floor above. The window opened after the usual foreign fashion, like a folding door, and had a hand-rail, but no balcony. Beneath was the stone terrace in front of the hotel.

It was clearly impossible for any living creature without wings to enter the room from that window; yet in my half-waking, half-dozing condition, it seemed to me that someone had entered by it.

A woman's figure, which might have dropped from the clouds, so suddenly had it appeared, stood in the opening, and after a pause stepped lightly in between the muslin curtains, and noiselessly approached the bed. As it came forward, the light of the night-lamp fell full upon its face. With a sudden shock and thrill of startled recognition, I saw that it was Miss Falconer.

She still wore her dinner-dress, with a light shawl over her

shoulders. Her face was pale, and had a strained and anxious look which was not the vacant expression of a sleep-walker.

Without the least hesitation, she made her way to Lady Rushton's side of the bed, and cautiously slipped her hand beneath the pillow.

Whatever she expected to find was evidently not there. Again and again the stealthy hand renewed its search—in vain.

At length she withdrew it, stood for a few seconds irresolute, then turned away, and crossing the room with a noiseless but leisurely step, passed out through the window—passed out, as it seemed, into mid-air—and vanished!

For a few moments I was literally too astonished to move, and lay staring stupidly at the window by which she had so unaccountably disappeared.

Then, waking up all at once, I sprang from the bed, and looked out wildly at earth, and air, and sky, in search of my mysterious visitor. There was not a trace of her to be seen, nor was there any rope or ladder by which she could have entered. A broad ledge, or pediment of sculptured stone, forming part of the architectural decoration of the house, projected beneath the windows, but it was divided by a good four feet from the corresponding ledge of the next one.

That she could have crossed the intervening space, unaided, at such a giddy height, was clearly an impossible supposition. Then how had she come, and gone?

Craning my neck, I could see that her window was closed and shuttered, no gleam of light appearing between the shutters, and no sound coming from the room. The more I puzzled over the matter, the more mysterious did it appear, and I began to think that I must in fact have dreamt the whole incident.

"What in the world are you doing at the window?" my wife's voice demanded, sleepily.

"I—was looking at the moon, my dear," I answered in some confusion, and was preparing to return to bed and resume my interrupted slumbers, when I caught sight of a small white object lying on the floor at my feet.

It was a lady's handkerchief—a dainty little lace-bordered square of cambric, embroidered in one corner with a Christian name in full. The name was Elsie.

The following morning, contrary to my usual habit, I rose early and went at once in search of Miss Falconer, whom I knew I should be pretty sure to find in the garden. I came upon her presently seated under a drooping pepper-tree, with a book on her knee.

The day was Sunday, and there was, I thought, a sort of Sabbath atmosphere about the girl as she sat there in her fresh white gown, the image of maiden purity and peace. With her delicate pensive face framed in cloudy golden hair, her soft appealing blue eyes and sensitive lips, she might have been the original of one of Raphael's

Madonnas. So lovely and so lovable she looked, it seemed sacrilege to suppose her capable of any evil thought or deed.

She glanced up with a smile as I approached—we were very good friends, she and I. "You are up early this morning, Sir John," she said, closing her book; "that is unusual, is it not?"

"Yes; early rising is not one of the virtues I practise habitually," I rejoined; "I keep it for special occasions."

"And is this a special occasion?"

"Certainly! I got up early to meet you."

She laughed.

"I should be immensely flattered if I could quite believe it."

"Well, it is partly true, but it is also true that I had a restless night, and was glad to be out of bed. You look as if you had not slept yourself," I added, glancing at her. "Your eyes are heavy."

"Oh yes, I slept very well last night," she answered, "though, strange to say, I never went to bed."

"How was that?" I inquired, pricking up my ears.

"Well, I had a bad headache yesterday evening, and papa persuaded me to lie down on the couch in my room and let him 'charm it away.' You have no idea how soothing his touch is. He just strokes my forehead and all the pain vanishes directly. In five minutes I was asleep; a deep dreamless sleep from which I did not wake till morning, when I was very much astonished to find myself still on the couch fully dressed."

"Ah!" I murmured thoughtfully, and was silent so long that she looked at me in surprise.

"I think I have something that belongs to you," I resumed at last, taking the handkerchief from my pocket.

"Oh yes, that is mine," she exclaimed; "where did you find it?"

"I found it," I answered deliberately, watching her face as I spoke, "in our bedroom, last night. How do you suppose it came there?"

She met my eyes without the faintest shadow of consciousness or confusion.

"Probably Lady Rushton took it in mistake for her own."

"H'm—perhaps so. You never walk in your sleep, I suppose?"

She laughed outright.

"Not that I am aware of. I hope you and Lady Rushton don't suspect me of prowling about your room at night?"

To that I made no reply, but fell into a brown study again, tracing figures in the gravel with my cane.

She watched me with a flicker of amusement in her eyes.

"I don't think early rising agrees with you, Sir John," she observed demurely, after a pause.

"You are right, it does not," I answered, rousing myself. "I suppose I ought to be as lively as a lark at this virtuous hour, but I find myself as stupid as an owl. I shall make no apology for leaving you—particularly," I added, glancing down the walk, where Reginald

Dane had just appeared, "as a more entertaining companion will take my place. *Au revoir!*"

Nodding to Reginald as I passed, I returned to the house, in a denser fog of perplexity than ever.

One thing was evident; Elsie was utterly unconscious of her action of the previous night. She had been a victim, not an accomplice; the helpless instrument of another's will.

What unholy spells had Captain Falconer exercised upon his daughter? Had she acted in obedience to "hypnotic suggestion"? That supposition seemed the most probable, in the light of what she had told me, but it still left unaccounted for the most perplexing point of the problem—how she could possibly have entered the room by the window. I puzzled over it till I was thoroughly bewildered, and at last dismissed the subject from my mind with the reflection that time would probably clear up the mystery, which, meanwhile, I resolved to keep strictly to myself.

Some days passed, however, and brought no solution, though they brought forth another event of some interest.

Reginald formally proposed to Captain Falconer for his daughter's hand—and, as I had anticipated, was rejected.

The Captain would condescend to give no explanation of his refusal except the statement that he had "other views" for her. The fact was, I suspect, that he did not see any prospective advantage to himself in the marriage, knowing that, when once it was a *fait accompli*, he would have nothing further to expect from Reginald, who frankly disliked him.

Anyhow, he refused point-blank, totally declining to be "squared." In vain the young man stormed and expostulated: in vain Elsie pleaded and wept. He met tears and anger with the same bland, but immovable determination. He laid no embargo on their intercourse, being fully aware that the girl was too dutiful, and too much afraid of him, to set him at defiance.

So the lovers continued to see each other as usual, but all their happiness was blighted. Elsie fretted openly, and Reginald took to evil courses; that is to say, he drank more than was good for him, and haunted the tables at the Casino when he ought to have been in bed. To compensate for having thwarted him in love, fortune favoured him in play. He won steadily, and on one particular evening, after a longer *séance* than usual, rose from the *trente-et-quarante* table, the richer by some twenty thousand francs.

I was with him at the time, having thought it well, in his present reckless mood, to keep an eye on his proceedings.

He was not in the least elated by his good luck, seeming to care little whether he won or lost. He thrust his pocket-book, which was crammed with notes, into the breast-pocket of his coat, and turned from the table with a yawn.

"My head aches," he said; "let's go and have a soda at the buffet."

But I linked my arm in his, and drew him towards the door. Captain Falconer was hovering near us, and there was a peculiar gleam in that "mesmeric" eye of his which I did not like.

"No more 'sodas' to-night," I said firmly; "you are going straight home to bed, and the first thing to-morrow morning you will deposit that money in the bank."

When we reached the hotel, I followed him upstairs to his room, and saw him throw the pocket-book carelessly into a drawer.

"I'm dead tired," he said, stretching himself; "I shall tumble in at once. Good-night, Sir John."

"Good-night and pleasant dreams," I rejoined; but instead of leaving the room, I locked the door, then proceeded with much deliberation to divest myself of my boots, and stretch myself on a couch which stood in the corner of the room.

Reginald stopped short in the act of removing his coat, and stared at me. "Hallo! what does that mean?" he demanded.

"It means, my dear boy, that I am going to pass the night here, if you have no objection."

"As guardian of the treasure?" he suggested, laughing. "I'm awfully obliged, I'm sure, but it really isn't necessary. The door is locked, and no one can possibly come in through the window."

"No matter. *J'y suis, j'y reste.*"

"All right! But don't lie there, anyhow. Take the bed, and I'll have the couch."

"I'm perfectly comfortable here, thank you," I answered, and tried to think I was; but what human being was ever comfortable on a French hotel "sofa"? However, the inhospitable piece of furniture had one advantage; it offered no temptation to sleep, and, for certain reasons, I was particularly anxious to keep awake to-night.

Reginald insisted on giving me a pillow, then he "tumbled in," and in ten minutes was fast asleep.

According to his usual habit, he had left the window wide open, and the soft, flower-scented air—mild as if the month were June, instead of January—blew in, gently fluttering the curtains. There was no toilette table to obstruct the view, and I caught a glimpse of the sea, above which a pale half-moon was rising.

It was long after midnight. The moon rose, brightening as it rose, and a dread pale ray of light streamed across the floor from the open window. Suddenly, a shadow obscured it, and, looking up, I saw a woman's figure framed in the opening, its outlines darkly relieved against the background of moonlit sky. It was Elsie Falconer!

She stood for a moment in a listening attitude, then stepped into the room. I could see her face distinctly, and saw that it had the same strained and troubled look I had noticed before.

She crossed into the middle of the room, and paused, looking about her, as if hesitating where to begin her search.

Then I stepped noiselessly forward out of the shadow, and con-

fronted her. She showed not the least alarm or surprise at my appearance, regarding me with mild, unspeculative eyes.

"You are looking for Reginald's pocket-book?" I said, in an undertone.

"Yes," she acquiesced quietly, as if it were the most simple and natural errand in the world.

"I will give it you," I answered, turning my back on her as I opened the drawer where Reginald had placed it.

After a moment I handed it to her. It contained, now, nothing but a slip of paper on which I had hastily pencilled a short but pithy note addressed to Captain Falconer.

She took it from me without a word, and turned to go. I followed her to the window, and a glance outside showed me how she had reached it. The solution of the mystery was so simple that I only wondered I had not guessed it before.

I have already said that beneath each of the windows on the second floor was a projecting ledge of sculptured stone. A narrow board about four feet long—evidently the shelf of a cupboard—had been placed between Miss Falconer's window and Reginald's, resting on the ledges, and forming a bridge which connected them.

What if the board slipped? What if she turned giddy at that perilous height? A false step would probably cost her her life, for nothing interposed to break her fall on to the stone-paved terrace beneath.

Involuntarily I made a movement to hold her back, but it was already too late.

Lightly, steadily, without a trace of fear, she stepped across. I saw a hand put forth from the adjoining window to draw her in; the board was instantly removed, the window closed, and all was still.

I listened intently for any sound of voices from the next room, but none reached me. After an interval, however, I heard the door softly open and close, and footsteps passed down the corridor. The Captain had probably read my note, and had retired to his own room to digest it. I smiled sweetly, and the thought of his discomfiture had so soothing an effect on me that, returning to my inhospitable couch, I slept the sleep of the just till morning.

When we assembled at lunch next day, I was scarcely surprised to find that one member of our little party was missing.

Captain Falconer, taking to heart my warning, had incontinently vanished from the scene, leaving behind him some valueless luggage, several unpaid bills—and his daughter.

Elsie never saw her father again. He was heard of from time to time at various haunts of high play, and later, the news came that he had lost his life in a gambling affray at San Francisco.

Long before that event, however, Elsie was Reginald Dane's wife.

THE QUESTION.

DOES all end here,—and will the tangled skein
Of life be never wound,
Or woven to a whole of clear design?
Is vanity the sum of all our days,
Body and spirit mingling with the ground,
Never to rise again, to sing or shine?
Are prayer and aspiration all in vain,
Good ever lost in evil, joy in pain,
And are they fools that walk in the old ways
Looking beyond this life to life Divine?
Does all end here?
Then farewell hope and fear,
"Live for to-day," for what is worth a tear
If this life be our bound?

But some, who would not lie,
Told us in days gone by
That this our life is as a minstrel tuning
The jangling strings, rich melody to wake
In some diviner sphere:—
The gardener pruning
An olive wild, some rarer graft to make;
A floweret's blooming,
To fade, and with the Spring new life to take;
The worm's entombing
To float on wings of fire, and flash in light;
The unchastened heart's denial
That humbled, it may soar;
The vessel's maiden trial,
Teaching the unskill'd helmsman how to steer
Beyond the tempest to a haven bright,
Where storms shall beat no more.
Believe, adore,
And all shall be made clear.
Then welcome Hope, though Hope should bring a fear,
And Joy, a tear,
And Love should sorrow bring, with all things dear;
Welcome the op'ning skies
Of Paradise,
And infinite horizons far and near.
By many a symbol sweet—
The quickened breath
Of snowdrops smiling on the frosty earth
To greet the New Year's birth—
By life in death—
By victory in defeat—
All is not ended here!

C. M. GEMMER.

"Am I to presume, Madam, that I see before me the widow of my late son, John Alexander Clare?"

THE ARGOSY.

APRIL, 1894.

THE GREY MONK.

By T. W. Speight, Author of "The Mysteries of Heron Dyke."

CHAPTER XIII.

CAPTAIN VERINDER AND HIS VISITOR.

WHILE the events bearing on the life-story of Ethel Thursby, as narrated in the last few chapters, were duly working themselves out, certain other events destined to exercise an important influence on her future, the chief factors in which were two people of whose very existence she was unaware, were in process of evolution.

It was eleven o'clock on a bright May morning, and Captain Verinder, who had only lately risen and had but just finished his breakfast, which this morning had consisted of nothing more substantial than a tumbler of rum and milk, was engaged in a rueful examination of the pockets of the suit of clothes he had been wearing the previous evening.

"Not a stiver more," he said, with a grimace, as he tossed his waistcoat across the room; and with that he turned and counted for the second time the little pile of silver and coppers which he had previously extracted from his pockets and placed on the chimney-piece. "Seven shillings and elevenpence-ha'penny, all told," he muttered; "and there's seventeen days yet to be got through before the end of the month."

It was not the first time by many that he had found himself "cornered," but the process became none the pleasanter through repetition.

He turned away with a shrug, and began to charge his meerschaum with the strong tobacco he was in the habit of smoking.

"When we find ourselves in a hole of our own digging, or in a scrape, the result of our own folly, we have a way of telling ourselves that the truest philosophy is to grin and bear it. Of course there's nothing else to be done, but it's only cold pudding at the best." He spoke aloud as he had a way of doing when alone. "Verinder, my dear boy, if there was ever any man who sold himself

cheap, you were that one last night. Let us hope you will take the lesson to heart, and not carry your nose quite so high in the air in time to come."

Having lighted his pipe, he drew his shabby dressing-gown about him and seated himself in a somewhat dilapidated easy-chair by his open window in Tilney Street, Soho—a narrow thoroughfare of tall, old-fashioned houses that had seen better days.

For anything beyond a small assured income of eighty pounds a year, Captain Verinder had to trust to the exercise of his wits. At this time he was a man of sixty, rather below the medium height, but still slim and upright for his years, and with something that might be termed semi-military in his appearance and carriage. The mental exercise in question took the form of billiards. Although far from being a fine player, his natural aptitude for the game had been cultivated by long practice, till he had attained a degree of proficiency at it which he found to answer his purpose very well indeed. That purpose was neither more nor less than to haunt the public rooms within a wide radius of his lodgings, on the look-out for those simpletons with more money than sense, of whom there is an unfailing supply in big cities, who can only be convinced at the expense of their pocket that in the art of billiard-playing they have not yet got beyond their apprenticeship. The Captain regarded it as a very poor week indeed at the end of which he did not find himself in pocket to the extent of fifty shillings, or three pounds—or rather, would have found himself that sum in pocket but for his ineradicable propensity for treating himself and others to innumerable "drinks" and cigars. When perfectly sober, he was one of the stingiest of mortals, but after his third glass he began to thaw, and, a little later, the veriest stranger would have been welcome to share his last shilling. It is a by no means uncommon trait.

On the evening of the day prior to the one with which we are now concerned, the Captain, in the course of his rounds, had encountered a sheep-faced, but gentlemanly-looking young fellow, in whom he thought he saw an easy prey.

What, then, was his rage and amazement when at the end of the evening the Captain's eyes opened to the fact that it was a case of the biter being bitten, and that the sheep-faced provincial, instead of being the greenhorn he looked, was, in reality, a graduate in the same school as himself.

Small wonder, then, was it that his thoughts this morning were bitter, when, after emptying his pockets, he realised that the absurdly inadequate sum of seven and elevenpence-halfpenny was all that was left him to exist on till the next quarterly payment of his income should fall due, which would not be till between a fortnight and three weeks hence.

He was still smoking moodily when he heard his landlady's shuffling

footsteps on the stairs, and, a moment later, her head was protruded into the room. "If you please, Captain, here's a lady asking for you," said Mrs. Rapp, a Londoner born and bred.

"A lady asking for me? Impossible!" exclaimed the Captain as he started to his feet.

"Not at all impossible, Uncle Augustus," said a full rich voice, and thereupon, following close upon the heels of Mrs. Rapp, there advanced into the room a tall and stately female figure, attired in black. Pausing in the middle of the floor, she raised the veil which had hitherto partially shrouded her features.

The captain stared for a moment or two, and then from his lips broke the one word, "Giovanna!"

"Yes, it is I—your niece Giovanna—come all the way from Italy to see you."

Mrs. Rapp discreetly withdrew.

Notwithstanding her years, which now numbered not far short of forty, Giovanna was still a very handsome woman, with a large and generous style of beauty which would have made her a striking figure anywhere. Although she called the Captain uncle, there was no blood relationship between the two, her mother having been merely Augustus Verinder's step-sister by a previous marriage. They had never met but once before, when the Captain had spent a month at the *osteria* of Giuseppe Rispani, Giovanna being at that time a girl of sixteen. Ever since her desertion of her husband in America she had passed as a widow—la Signora Alessandro. She had not been without offers of marriage meanwhile, but had not seen her way to accept any of them. As to whether her husband was alive or dead, she had no knowledge.

Giuseppe Rispani had recently died, and Vanna, having realised the small fortune bequeathed her by him, had now come to England, which she had long wished to visit.

In the course of the confidential talk that ensued between Vanna and her uncle she was induced by the latter to relate to him all about her marriage, the details of which were quite new to him.

She began by telling him of the arrival of the young Englishman, Mr. Alexander, at Catanzaro; of his long stay at the *osteria* of the Golden Fig; of the coming of two other Englishmen, one of whom proved to be the father of Mr. Alexander, and of their departure next day. Then she proceeded to recount how the young Englishman proposed to her, how she accepted him, and how she did not learn till her marriage-day that her husband's full name was John Alexander Clare. She made no mention of her father's discovery by means of the peephole in the ceiling, but simply said, "I knew before my marriage that my husband's father, on the occasion of his visit, had given him six thousand pounds in English money." Then she went on to tell of the departure of her husband and herself for America, of the death of their child; and of their subsequent separation, which she made out to have been a matter of mutual arrangement; and wound

up by saying, "From that day to this I have heard no tidings of my husband."

"Neither, I'll wager, have you ever made any effort to find out who the father was that could afford to give his son six thousand pounds in order to get rid of him," remarked the Captain when she had come to the end of her narrative.

"No. What business was it of mine?" demanded Vanna with a stare.

"Ah, that's just the point which you have never thought it worth your while to test. Yet, who can say that it might not have proved to be very much your business indeed?"

Then to himself he added: "This seems to me a little matter which may be worth inquiring into. But, good gracious! to think that there should be such imbeciles in the world as this niece of mine!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CAPTAIN TAKES A LITTLE JOURNEY.

The more Captain Verinder turned over in his mind the chief points of the story told him by his niece, the more convinced he became that it was indeed, as he had remarked to himself at the time, a matter worth inquiring into.

The Captain, when once he had made up his mind to any particular course of action, was not a man to let the grass grow under his feet. His first proceeding was to seek out a certain billiard-room acquaintance of the name of Tring—a man who had got through two fortunes in his time and was now reduced to earning a scanty livelihood by literary hackwork at the British Museum. Having given him the particulars of the information he required, the Captain met him by appointment a couple of days later.

"The only person I can find," said Tring, "of the name specified by you that seems likely to answer to your requirements, is a certain Sir Gilbert Clare, of Withington Chase, Hertfordshire, the representative of one of the oldest titles in the kingdom."

Captain Verinder, having taken a note of the name and address in his pocket-book and paid the other for his trouble, went his way. His next step, the following morning, was to call on Giovanna with a request for the loan of ten pounds.

"'Tis not for myself I ask it," he said with one of the grandiloquent airs in which he sometimes indulged. "It will be expended to the last farthing in your service, my dear. I refrain from saying more at present, save that in the course of a few days I hope to be the bearer of news that will—well, that will astonish you very considerably."

Vanna raised no objection to lending her uncle the amount he

asked for, although by this time she had seen enough of him to feel pretty sure that she would never see a shilling of it back.

In the course of the following day Captain Verinder booked himself by train to Mapleford, which station he had ascertained to be the nearest to the point he was bound for. His object was to try to discover whether the John Alexander Clare whom his niece had married so many years before was in any way related to, or connected with, Sir Gilbert Clare of Withington Chase.

The Captain having located himself at the best hotel, and partaken of a dinner such as had been altogether beyond his means for a long time past, proceeded to take a quiet stroll about the little town, which, however, had nothing of interest to offer for his inspection. Later on he found his way into the coffee-room of the hotel, which place, as he had expected it would, drew to itself in the course of the evening a round dozen or more of the better class of tradespeople and others, all of whom, it was evident, were in the habit of frequently meeting there. Here he found no difficulty in ascertaining everything about Sir Gilbert that it concerned him to know. Thus, he learnt that Sir Gilbert's son by his first marriage had left England, after a quarrel with his father, more than twenty years before, and that, a few years later, news had come to hand that he had lost his life through some accident abroad, only, nobody seemed to know either the nature of the accident in question, or where it had happened. Further, the Captain learnt that the second Lady Clare and her three sons were all dead, and that Sir Gilbert, a broken, childless old man of seventy-four, was living at the Chase in a seclusion that was rarely broken by any visitor from the outside world.

It was on a Friday that the Captain went down to Mapleford, and the following Monday saw him back in town. He had stayed in the country over Sunday in order that he might be present at morning service at the church, just beyond the precincts of the Chase, which Sir Gilbert made a point of attending, and where several generations of his progenitors were buried.

The Captain wanted to see for himself what kind of man Sir Gilbert was. The latter arrived in due course, alone and on foot, and from the place where he sat Verinder had an unimpeded view of him. When service was over the Captain took a stroll round the church, pausing to look at every monument and to read every inscription commemorative of dead and gone members of the Clare family. One inscription, and one only, had any special interest for him. It was that which recorded the death of "John Alexander Clare, eldest son of Sir Gilbert Clare, who was accidentally killed abroad" on such and such a date. "I would wager a hundred pound note to a fiver—if I had one," said the Captain with emphasis, "that this tablet refers to Vanna's husband and to no one else. It's altogether out of the question that there should have been two John Alexander Clares living at the same time. And to think that the young man has been dead

for seventeen years and that his widow has known nothing about it? What a fortunate thing it is for her that she has got a man of the world like me at her back! From this day forward her interests and mine are identical."

A jubilant man was Captain Verinder when he went back to London next day.

About mid-day on Tuesday he called on Giovanna at the boarding-house—one largely frequented by foreigners—at which she had located herself for the time being. That the news of which he was the bearer was a great surprise to her hardly needs to be stated. It was both a surprise and a shock, for although she had never really cared for Alec as a wife should care for her husband, and had left him of her own accord and under most cruel circumstances, through all the years which had intervened since then his image had been often in her thoughts, but it was as a man still living and in the prime of life that he had dwelt in her memory. Consequently, to be told suddenly that he had met with a violent death seventeen years before, which pointed to a time almost immediately after her desertion of him, was enough to thrill her through every fibre of her being.

Well, whatever uncertainty she might heretofore have felt with regard to her husband's fate had no longer any room for existence. She had been a widow all these years without knowing it.

Before long the Captain went on to speak of Sir Gilbert, and to detail all that he had heard in reference to him. He had always been rather clever as an amateur sketcher, and could catch a likeness better than most people, and he now took pencil and paper and with a few bold strokes drew an outline portrait of the baronet. Pushing it across the table to Vanna, he said: "Does that in any way resemble the English *milor* who travelled all the way to Catanzaro to see the Mr. John Alexander who became your husband a little later?"

"Yes, that is the man," said Vanna quietly when she had examined the sketch.

"Ah; I thought as much," remarked her uncle drily.

"And now that you have found out all this about Sir Gilbert Clare, in what way does it, or can it, affect me?" queried Vanna presently.

The Captain regarded her with a pitying smile, as he might a child who had asked him some utterly preposterous question.

"Cannot you see that the fact of your father-in-law being a rich and childless man may be made—I say *made*—to affect your fortunes very materially—very materially indeed? That is," he added a moment after, "if you only know how to put the knowledge thus acquired to a practical use."

Giovanna shook her head. It was evident that she could not in the least comprehend what her uncle was driving at.

The Captain's shoulders went up nearly to his ears. "What a very fortunate thing it is, my dear, that at such an important crisis of your life you have by your side a thorough man of the world like myself

—and one so completely devoted to your interests! Were you my own child I could not entertain a greater regard and affection for you than I do."

Vanna sat grandly unmoved, her statuesque features betraying no slightest trace of emotion

"As cold as a marble goddess," muttered the Captain under his breath as he produced his cigar case, for he was a man who regarded smoking as one of the necessaries of existence.

For a little space he smoked in silence; then all at once he said, as if it were an echo of some thought he had been revolving in his mind: "What a pity, what an enormous pity it is, that your child did not live till now!"

A sudden spasm, gone almost as soon as it had come, contracted the muscles of Vanna's face; her teeth bit hard into her underlip; but never a word answered she.

"Come," said the Captain a few minutes later; "put on your things and let us go for a stroll in the Park. It's a lovely afternoon, and there will be no end of swells in the Row."

Nothing loth was Giovanna to comply. As yet she had seen hardly anything of London, and what she had seen had not impressed her over favourably. It had been one of the dreams of her life to see Hyde Park in the height of the season, and now her dream was about to be fulfilled. In ten minutes she was ready to set out.

The Captain chartered a hansom—it was the first time his niece had been in one—telling the driver to take his time and go by way of Regent Street and Piccadilly. Here at length was London as Vanna had imagined it to be.

As the Captain had prophesied, the Row was crowded. They strolled about for a while in the warm sunshine, and then found a couple of chairs whence they could take in the varied features of the passing show at their leisure. A proud man was Captain Verinder that day. In all that gay and fashionable throng there were not, in his opinion, more than three or four women who in point of looks were fit to be matched with the one by his side—that is to say (to compare one thing with another), if a rose may be considered to be in the perfection of its beauty when it is fully blown, and not when it is merely a blushing bud of undeveloped possibilities. Although nearing her fortieth birthday, Giovanna—unlike the majority of her country-women, who age early—was remarkably young-looking for her years. But then she was English on her mother's side, and that may have had something to do with the matter. She was wearing a charming half-mourning costume, with bonnet to match, which she had bought since her arrival in London. Many were the glances of admiration of which she was the recipient, many the heads that were turned for a second look at her tall figure, so stately and yet so graceful, with her pale classic features, clear-cut as some antique gem, as she threaded her way through the crowd with the proud composed air of

one "to the manner born." Well might Captain Verinder feel proud of his charge.

"Do you see that *blasé*-looking man driving that pair of splendid chestnuts?" he said to Vanna a few minutes after they had sat down. "He is Lord Elvaston, one of the greatest *roués* about town. He used to know me well enough before he came into his fortune a score of years ago, when he was not above borrowing a five-pound note from anybody who would lend him one. Now, of course, he passes me as if he had never set eyes on me in his life. But such is the way of the world, more especially of the world of fashion."

Then a few minutes later, "Note that painted woman in the too palpable wig being driven slowly past in her yellow chariot. That is Lady Anne Baxendale. Her father was only a country rector on three hundred a year. The rectory grounds adjoined those of the house where I was born. Your mother, when a girl, and little Nan Cotsmore were great friends. I've seen them play skipping-rope by the hour together."

But Verinder had another motive in view in thus introducing his niece to one of the most striking spectacles which the metropolis has to offer for the delectation of the strangers within its gates. He wanted to excite in her bosom a feeling which should be compounded in about equal measure of envy and discontent—envy of those who, although, for the passing hour, she seemed as one of themselves, were yet as far removed from her by their wealth and position as if she and they were inhabitants of two totally different spheres (which, indeed, in one sense, they were); and discontent with the humble and prosaic surroundings of her own obscure existence. If he had read Giovanna aright, it seemed to him that it ought not to be a difficult matter to foment within her the very undesirable sentiments in question.

"Are you sorry, my dear, that I brought you here this afternoon?" he asked, after a longer pause than common.

"Sorry! oh no, how could I be? It is a beautiful sight. Nay, it is more than beautiful, it is magnificent. This is London as I used to dream of it."

"But never, I'll wager, with any thought that it might possibly one day become a reality to you."

"A reality, you mean, as far as it can become such to one who, like myself, is a mere looker-on."

"When I spoke of its becoming a reality to you, I did not mean merely as a spectator, but as an actor in the show—a recognised actor in it and acknowledged as one of themselves by the 'smartest' people here."

Giovanna turned two deep wondering eyes on the Captain.

"You talk in riddles, Uncle," she said quietly.

"You seem to forget, my dear—or rather, perhaps, I ought to say that you fail sufficiently to realise in your thoughts—the position which is, or ought to be, yours by right of your marriage with the late

John Alexander Clare. You are the widow of the heir of Withington Chase, the daughter-in-law of a wealthy baronet of ancient family. As such, your proper position is there—there, as one of the glittering throng passing and repassing before our eyes. You ought to be riding in your own brougham or barouche, with your own coachman and footman. You ought to be wearing the family diamonds—who has so much right to them as you?—and where is there another woman who would show them off to better advantage? You ought to have your own little establishment in town, with your own servants—say, a flat of six or seven rooms somewhere in Belgravia, where you could invite your old uncle to come and see you as often as you might feel inclined for his company. I repeat, that all these things ought of right to be yours."

Giovanna's nostrils dilated, a hard cold glitter came into her eyes, her bosom began to rise and fall more quickly than it was wont to do; there was a chord in her somewhat lymphatic nature which responded to her uncle's words. Her own diamonds, her own carriage, her own establishment in London, and, above all, to be transformed from a nobody into a Somebody, and to have the great world of rank and fashion recognise her as one of themselves! Oh, it was too much! The vision was too dazzling. A low cry, half of pain, half of pleasure, broke from her. The Captain was watching her out of a corner of his eye. But presently a chill struck her and her face blanched a little. Turning to Verinder, she said:

"But you seem to have forgotten, Uncle, that Sir Gilbert Clare does not so much as know of my existence—nay, the chances are that he was not even aware that his son was ever married."

"But I mean him to be made aware both of one fact and the other before he is very much older," responded the Captain with a sinister smile. "Ah! a spot or two of rain. We had better be moving." Then, as they rose: "There is only one course open to us, Vanna *mia*," he whispered meaningly, "and that is, to *find* Sir Gilbert an heir."

CHAPTER XV.

CONSPIRATORS THREE.

When Captain Verinder enunciated the startling statement with which the last chapter concludes, he had already conceived a certain scheme in his brain, which, in the course of next day, he took the first steps towards reducing to practice, but without saying a word to his niece of his intentions.

Many years before, Giovanna's only brother, Luigi Rispani, had come to London by way of advancing his fortunes. He was energetic and persevering, with a gift for languages, and after a time he obtained the post of foreign correspondent in a city house of business.

A little later he married a country-woman of his own, and then, after a few years, both he and his wife died, leaving one son behind them who was named after his father. This son was now about twenty years old, a dark-eyed, good-looking, quick-witted young fellow, but having within him the germs of certain scampish propensities, which, up till now, had only been able to develop themselves after a weak and tentative fashion. Luigi earned his living in part as drawing-master to a number of cheap suburban boarding-schools, and in part, when his other duties were over for the day, by acting as check-taker at one of the West End theatres.

The Captain and the elder Rispani had been on fairly intimate terms, and after the latter's death he had never altogether lost sight of the lad. Sometimes, when he had been more than usually lucky at billiards, he would look up young Luigi and treat him to a dinner of four or five courses at some foreign restaurant in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, and at parting press a couple of half-crowns into his unreluctant palm. Verinder, who by long habit had become a tolerably shrewd reader of character, had long ago summed up in his mind the most salient characteristics of Luigi Rispani, and he now said to himself, with a pleasant sense of elation: "Here is the very tool I need ready to my hand. If I were to search London round I could not find one that would suit my purpose better."

This evening he sought out Luigi at the theatre where the young man was engaged, and after shaking hands with him, said: "I wish to see you most particularly. Come to my den after you have finished here and I will tell you what I want you for."

Luigi went straight from the theatre to his uncle's rooms. (As long as he could remember he had been used to calling the Captain "uncle"). The ghostly light of dawn was in the eastern sky before the two separated. The nature of the business discussed by them will be made clear by a conversation which took place next day between the Captain and his niece.

"You have not forgotten our talk in the Park the day before yesterday?" said the former.

"There was much in it which I am not likely readily to forget. All the same, you said certain things which, the more I think of them, the more extravagant and incapable of ever being realised they seem to me."

"That is just what I am here to-day to endeavour to disprove," remarked the Captain in his dryest tones. "You don't object to my smoking, I know. Thanks."

As soon as he had selected and lighted a cigar, he resumed:

"You already know my views as to the position which, in my opinion, you ought to occupy as daughter-in-law to Sir Gilbert Clare of Withington Chase. That you have an undoubted claim on the old baronet I think very few people would be found to dispute, and the question we have now to consider is the most desirable mode

of urging that claim upon his notice in order that the utmost possible advantage may accrue to you therefrom. As you justly remarked the other day, the probability is that Sir Gilbert was never made aware of his son's marriage, and, consequently, cannot have the remotest suspicion that the young man left a widow to mourn his loss. Now, from all I heard of the baronet when I was in the country last week, I take him to be a hardfisted, penurious curmudgeon, who, to judge from his style of living, must be laying by several thousands a year—though, why he should care to do so, goodness only knows, seeing that he has nobody he cares about to leave his savings to—the next heir being a half-cousin with whom he has been at outs for the last thirty years. Now, it seems to me, taking into account the kind of man he is, that if you were to introduce yourself to his notice merely on the ground of being the widow of his son—who died nearly twenty years ago—and a person of whom probably he has never heard before, he might perhaps, without wholly ignoring your claim upon him, not merely satisfy his conscience, but persuade himself into the belief that he was acting a most generous part by you, if he were to allow you a paltry hundred, or, at the most, a couple of hundred pounds a year as long as he lives. But, Giovanna, my dear, it is more—much more—than that that I want to help you to secure for yourself. I want to see you in the position which would have been yours at your husband's death had you married John Alexander Clare with his father's full knowledge and consent. In that case you would undoubtedly have had a jointure of not less than seven or eight hundred a year, and I want us two to try whether we cannot see our way to secure something like an equivalent settlement for you, even after all this length of time."

Vanna was staring straight before her with an introspective expression in her midnight orbs. When the silence had lasted some time, she said very quietly :

"You are working out some scheme in your brain, Uncle, I feel sure of it ; you have something more to tell me—something to propose. Is it not so ? "

He considered the ash of his cigar for a moment or two, then, lifting his eyes to her face, he said :

"What a pity—what a very great pity it is that your boy did not live to be here to-day ! "

As before, when he spoke of the loss of her child, an indescribable expression flitted across Giovanna's face.

"That is precisely what you said the other day," she remarked, coldly. "Where is the use of referring a second time to a misfortune which happened so long ago ? "

"Because I cannot help contrasting your position to-day with what it would have been could you but have taken your boy by the hand, and have said to Sir Gilbert : 'You lost your son and heir long years ago : but to-day I bring you a grandson to take his place. Here is

the new heir of Withington Chase.' In that case, how the old man would have welcomed you!—nothing would have seemed too good for you, so overjoyed would he have been. The position which ought to have been yours from the first would then be accorded you, and you would take your place in society as the daughter-in-law of Sir Gilbert Clare, and the mother of the next heir. And then, a little later, my Vanna, you would marry again. Oh, yes, you would! Marry money—and perhaps a title to boot. Why not? You are one of the handsomest women in London, or else I don't know a handsome woman when I see one!"

Vanna rose abruptly from her chair, and then sat down again. For once she was profoundly moved.

"Oh, Uncle, this is the merest folly!" she cried. "Why talk of impossibilities? Let us keep to realities. I thought you had something to propose—something, perhaps, that would——"

"So I have, my dear; so I have something to propose," responded the Captain, with a chuckle. "What I said to you the other day was, 'There is only one course open to us, and that is to find Sir Gilbert an heir.'"

"Well?" demanded Vanna with wide-open eyes. "I failed to understand your meaning then and I am not a bit the wiser now."

"Listen then. Although, owing to circumstances to which I need not further refer, we are not in a position to go before Sir Gilbert and produce the real heir, is that any reason why we should not find a substitute who would answer both his purpose and ours just as well as the genuine article?" His cunning eyes were watching her eagerly.

Vanna's face expressed a growing wonder, but it was a wonder largely compounded of bewilderment.

"*Ecoutez*," resumed her uncle. "Let us assume for the moment that you agree with me what a very desirable thing it would be to provide Sir Gilbert with an heir, even though it would, of necessity, have to be a fictitious one. Being, then, so far in accord, naturally the first question would be, 'But where are we to find the heir in question—or rather, someone by whom he could be personated?' To which I should reply that I am prepared at any moment to lay my finger on the one person out of all the hundreds and thousands of people in this big city best suited to our purpose. That person is none other than your own nephew (whom I believe you have never yet set eyes on), the son of your only brother, Luigi Rispani."

Sheer amazement kept Giovanna silent.

"I have already seen Luigi and sounded him in the matter," resumed the Captain. "He fully agrees with me that the idea is a most admirable one, and one which, if carried out in all its details with that care and foresight which I should not fail to bestow on it, could not prove otherwise than brilliantly successful. In short, Luigi places himself unreservedly in my hands. So now, my dear Vanna, it only remains for you to follow your nephew's excellent example."

It is not needful that we should recount in detail what further passed between uncle and niece either at this or subsequent interviews. Enough to say that when once she had been talked over into giving her consent, and had thoroughly mastered the details of the scheme as proposed to be carried out by her uncle, she entered fully into the affair, and seemed to have thrown whatever moral scruples might at one time have feebly held her back completely to the winds. But before all this came about Luigi Rispani and his aunt had been brought together. Although English blood on the female side ran in the veins of both, they might have been pure Italians for anything in their looks which proclaimed the contrary. In point of fact, there was a very marked family likeness between the two, so much so, indeed, that the Captain could not help saying to himself with a chuckle, "Nobody seeing them together, would take them for other than mother and son."

At length all the details of the scheme were so far elaborated and agreed upon by our three conspirators that Verinder felt the time had come for him to make his first important move, which was, to seek an interview with Sir Gilbert Clare, or, as he preferred to express it, to "beard the lion in his den."

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW SIR GILBERT RECEIVED THE NEWS.

It is to be hoped that the reader has not quite forgotten the existence of Everard Lisle.

After Ethel Thursby's refusal of him on her eighteenth birthday he went back with a sad heart to his duties at Withington Chase. There he had rooms in the house of Mr. Kinaby, the land steward, an old red brick house situated a little way outside the precincts of the park. Mr. Kinaby's health had been failing for some time, and Everard was gradually taking over the greater part of his duties. Every morning he went to the Chase to see to Sir Gilbert's correspondence and take his instructions in reference to the estate and other matters. But he had still other duties to attend to. In addition to being a numismatist of some note and a collector of curios, Sir Gilbert of late years had developed into an antiquarian and archæologist, and for some time past had been engaged in putting together the framework of what he intended ultimately to elaborate into an exhaustive history of the "hundred" of the county in which the Chase was situated, as natives of which his ancestors for three centuries back had played more or less conspicuous parts. In furtherance of this labour of love, for such it was to him, he found Everard very useful in the way of hunting up authorities, making extracts and transcribing his notes into a caligraphy which it would be possible for a compositor to set up—when, at some as yet unknown date, the great work should be

sufficiently advanced to be sent to press—without having to tear his hair in the process.

Sir Gilbert, whom advancing years had tended to render more of a recluse than ever, had gradually, and by a process of which he himself was scarcely conscious, begun to entertain a great liking (in his frigid, undemonstrative way) for this frank-eyed, clear-headed, straightforward young man, in whom he could detect no faintest trace of sycophancy, and who knew so well how to retain the full measure of his own self-respect without in any way grating against the *amour-propre* of his employer. Lisle had evolved a happy faculty of managing the lonely cantankerous old man, for whom he often felt a profound pity, as no one before had ever succeeded in managing him. Thus it had come to pass that a week never went by without Everard being asked to dine once, and frequently oftener, at the Chase. On these occasions, when dinner was over, the old man and the young one would wind up the evening by playing a few sober games of chess or backgammon, at both of which Sir Gilbert was an adept. By the time the turret clock struck ten, Everard would be strolling back through the park in the direction of his rooms, with no company save a cigar and his own thoughts. At such seasons, with the fresh night air blowing about him, with the stars raining down sweet influences upon him, and with the huge ghost-like trees to sentinel him on his way, whither ought a young man's thoughts to wing their flight save to the one fair being, fairer to him than all the world beside, who holds captive his heart, a willing prisoner!

But, in Everard's case, she who still held his heart captive did so all unwittingly. She had rejected his proffered love and all was at an end between them. He could never hope to win her for his wife, but that seemed to him no reason, however little such a course might recommend itself to his cooler judgment, why he should not go on loving her just as he had done all along. In any case, he did go on loving her, nor did it seem possible to him that a time should ever come when he could do otherwise. He knew that in all human probability the day was not far distant when he should hear the news of her marriage with another, and he tried to school himself by anticipation, so that when the shock should come, he might be enabled to bear it with manly equanimity.

On a certain morning, as Sir Gilbert Clare and Everard Lisle were engaged together in the library at Withington Chase, a servant entered carrying a highly-glazed card on a salver. "I have shown the gentleman into the morning-room, sir," said the man as he presented the card.

Sir Gilbert took it and adjusted his pince-nez. "Captain Verinder," he read aloud. "Have no recollection of anyone of that name. Um-um. I suppose I must go and see what he wants me for." Then, to the man, "Tell Captain Verinder I will be with him immediately."

The Captain had come down from town by an early train and had made his way on foot from the railway station to the Chase. He had not seen anything of the old mansion on the occasion of his previous visit, and as he drew near, approaching it by way of the drive, he could not help being much impressed, not merely by its size and the noble simplicity of its façade, but by the old-time air of stately, if somewhat faded, dignity which seemed as integral a part of it as the ivy which clung round its gables and chimneys, or the patches of many-coloured lichen with which time had encrusted its high-pitched roof. Nor was this impression lessened when, in response to his summons, a servant in livery opened wide the great double doors, and having taken his card, ushered him through the big echoing hall, hung with trophies of war and the chase, into a charming room furnished in the Empire style —although, to be sure, the gilding was tarnished and the coverings of chairs and lounges considerably the worse for wear—which looked out through its long windows on a gay parterre of flowers, and was shut in with a sort of sweet privacy by a semi-circular hedge of laurel and box. And here Sir Gilbert found his visitor some three minutes later.

The Captain, it may be remembered, had only seen the baronet once before, on that Sunday morning when he took account of him in his high-backed pew at church. Now that he beheld him close at hand, he could not help saying to himself, "What a grand wreck of a man! —and what a splendid fellow he must have been in his prime!" And indeed, although Sir Gilbert's one-time height of six feet two inches was now slightly curtailed owing to the burden of his years, he still towered above most people with whom he came in contact, as though he were descended from some heroic race of old, while his shaggy brows, his white drooping moustache, his high thin nose and his eyes still luminous with a sort of untamed fire, lent to his aspect a something of leonine majesty.

"Captain Verinder, I presume," said Sir Gilbert as he advanced, holding the other's card between his thumb and forefinger. The Captain bowed. "You have—a—um—the advantage of me, sir. But pray be seated." His keen critical eyes were taking Verinder in from head to foot as he spoke. It was a scrutiny which, despite his coolness and his habitual indifference to the opinion of others, somewhat disconcerted the latter.

"I have taken the liberty of intruding upon you, Sir Gilbert," he began, as he drew forward a chair and gave a little preliminary cough behind his hand, "in order that I may have an opportunity of laying before you certain information which has only quite recently come into my possession, but which, I feel sure, when you have been made aware of it, you will agree with me is of the greatest possible importance."

Sir Gilbert opened his eyes a little wider than usual. "Pray proceed, sir," he said stiffly.

"The information to which I refer bears especially on certain

incidents in the life of your late son and heir, Mr. John Alexander Clare."

On the instant Sir Gilbert's figure became as rigid as a ramrod. His lips opened and then shut again without a sound.

"Unless my information is at fault," resumed the Captain, "the last occasion on which you and your son met was when, accompanied by another gentleman, you stopped for a few hours at Catanzaro in Calabria, at which place Mr. Clare was then residing."

Sir Gilbert contented himself with bowing a grave assent. His face just then was a puzzle.

"Shortly afterwards Mr. Clare emigrated to the United States, and there, between two and three years later, he unfortunately met with his death through an accident." Here the Captain paused and looked questionably at Sir Gilbert.

"Your information, Mr—er—Captain Verinder, is quite correct as far as it goes," said the latter as if in response to the look. "Still, I fail to see in what way—er—in short——"

"Why I, a stranger, have had the impertinence to come here and talk to you about matters which, as you doubtless think, can be no possible concern of mine," interposed Verinder coolly. "That is the precise point, Sir Gilbert, as to which I now propose to enlighten you."

Drawing his chair a few inches closer to that of Sir Gilbert he resumed:

"I have merely recapitulated certain facts already known to you in order that I might thereby be enabled to lead up to certain other facts which, as I have every reason to believe, have never been brought under your cognisance."

He paused for a moment as if to allow his next words to gather force thereby.

"Sir, is it within your knowledge that when your son left Italy for America he took with him—a wife?"

At these words Sir Gilbert's jaw dropped, a curious glaze came over his eyes and his fingers began to twitch spasmodically. The Captain sprang to his feet; he was on the point of ringing for help, but a gesture on the part of the baronet restrained him.

"I shall be better in a minute or two," he said in a hoarse whisper. Verinder crossed to the window. Two or three minutes passed, then a hollow changed voice said: "What proof have you that your most strange statement is true?"

"The most convincing of all proofs, Sir Gilbert—a living one. Your son's wife—or widow, as I ought rather to term her—is in London at this moment."

"Alive?—and I have known nothing of her existence all these years! It is incredible, sir—incredible. I am being made the victim of some vile conspiracy."

"Conspiracy, indeed! Nothing of the kind, sir, I give you my

word—the word of an officer and a gentleman—hem! I condescend to overlook your words, Sir Gilbert, in consideration of the singularity of the circumstances, otherwise——"

The rest of the sentence was drowned in a cough. He said no more, but twisted one end of his moustache viciously, and scowled at the chandelier.

"It is incredible," Sir Gilbert kept murmuring under his breath without heeding Verinder. The latter waited patiently. One half his tale, and that the more amazing half, had yet to be told. At length Sir Gilbert seemed to pull himself together. Turning on his visitor a face which seemed even more sternly set than usual, he said: "Assuming for the moment, sir, the accuracy of what you have just told me—which, mind you, at present I am by no means prepared to admit—will you be good enough to inform me who and what the—the person was with whom my son was so foolishly weak as to contract a secret marriage."

It was a question for which the Captain had prepared himself, and he answered it on the moment.

"The lady in question was born in Italy, her father being a native of that country, and her mother an Englishwoman. Signor Rispani was a scion of an impoverished patrician family which can boast of I know not how many quarterings with other families as noble as itself."

This latter statement, it may be remarked, was a deliberate invention on the Captain's part. He had calculated that it would not be without its effect on the baronet, as also that the latter, in all probability, had never heard the name of Rispani, or, if he had heard it during his brief sojourn at Catanzaro, that he had long ago forgotten it.

"Um—um. And the young woman's mother—what of her? You say she was an Englishwoman."

"Her mother, Sir Gilbert Clare, was my sister," replied the Captain as he laid his hand over the region of his heart and bent his head, while his look said as plainly as words, "After that statement, it would be nothing less than an impertinence on your part to inquire further."

Sir Gilbert bowed with his most courtly air. "Thank you very much, Captain Verinder," he said. Then, after stroking his chin for a few seconds, he went on: "May I ask, sir, whether your visit here to-day is with the knowledge and sanction of your niece—that is to say of the—the lady whom you allege to be the widow of my son?"

"Had my visit not been undertaken at her express desire, it would not have taken place at all."

"Um. Then will it be thought presumptuous on my part to ask by what particular motive your niece is actuated in asking you, after a silence which has lasted nearly a score of years, to bring under my notice certain facts hitherto, I admit, unknown to me, but which, for anything which has yet been advanced to the contrary, might just

as well have been left in the oblivion to which, apparently, they have for so long a time been consigned."

There was a veiled insolence in this request, or so it seemed to Verinder, which sent an angry flush mounting to the very roots of his dyed hair. It was only by a supreme effort that he succeeded in keeping back the retort that rose to his lips. Not till he had drawn several breaths did he trust himself to reply. Then he said: "Should you condescend, Sir Gilbert, to grant my niece an interview, you will find her amply prepared to furnish you with such an explanation of her long silence as, I venture to think, you will find it impossible to cavil at. But the one great reason which has induced her, at what may be called the eleventh hour, to rake certain facts out of oblivion, as you have so expressively termed it, and bring them before you, is, because it seems to her an imperative duty that you should no longer be left in ignorance of the existence of your grandson—of the son of your son, the late John Alexander Clare."

"What is that you say?" almost shrieked Sir Gilbert. "A grandson! the child of my son Alec—and alive!"

"Very much alive, Sir Gilbert, if you will allow me to say so," returned the Captain, with something between a grin and a sneer. "And as fine, and handsome, and clever a young man as you would find in a day's march."

Sir Gilbert lay back in his chair, his chin drooping on his breast and his eyes closed. His face was of a ghastly pallor, his lips moved inaudibly. In the shock of Verinder's news he had forgotten the man's presence. An invisible hand had snatched him away. He was there in body but for the time his spirit was otherwhere.

The Captain was biting his nails and regarding him furtively. "How will he take it?" he asked himself. "I have a presentiment that my little scheme will result in a brilliant success. For all Sir Gilbert looks as strong as some gnarled old monarch of the woods, who can say whether he's sound at the core? Looks are deceptive things, and at his age he might go off at a day's notice—nay, without any notice at all. It was nothing less than a stroke of genius to represent Vanna's father as belonging to the old Italian nobility. It touched him in a weak spot. Vanna must on no account forget that she is no longer an innkeeper's daughter, but a person of much greater consequence. Well, I will give her credit for one thing; as far as looks and bearing go, she might be a princess born, or the daughter of a duke. Ah! who comes now?"

The question was elicited by a discreet tap at the door, which was followed, an instant later, by the entrance of a servant.

"If you please, Sir Gilbert," said the man, "Lady Nelthorpe has called and would like to see you. Her ladyship wished me to say that she won't detain you more than five minutes."

The sound of the man's voice served to break Sir Gilbert's waking

trance. He opened his eyes, gave a little start, and grasping an arm of his chair with either hand, he drew himself into an upright position. Next moment he was himself again.

"Repeat your message," he said to the man in his usual curt, imperious tones; and when that had been done, he said: "Tell her ladyship that I will be with her in three minutes," adding, *sotto voce*, "Plague take the woman! she never calls on me except when she wants to cozen me out of a cheque for one or other of her preposterous projects."

Then his eyes turned to Verinder, who had drawn his chair somewhat aside on the entrance of the servant, and as he did so, the expression of his face changed.

"Pardon me," he said, "if for the moment I had forgotten your presence. I am getting into years," he added with a faint sigh, "and at times—only at times, mind you—my memory fails me somewhat. The news you have brought me, Captain—er—er—Dear me, how annoying!"

"Verinder," suggested the other.

"To be sure, to be sure. The news you have brought me, Captain Verinder, is of such a surprising kind that I may be pardoned if I find myself unable all at once to realise it as something within the bounds of possibility. It—it seems like an incident culled from some romance." Here he rose to his feet. There was a strange yearning look in his eyes as he turned and faced the Captain. "Do you mean to assure me, sir, on your word as a man of honour," he said in a voice the deep impressiveness of which was not without a touch of pathos, "that you are prepared to produce before me a young man whom you will vouch for as being the offspring of my son John Alexander Clare."

Laying a hand over his heart, the Captain, who had also risen, said with grave solemnity: "On my word of honour, Sir Gilbert Clare, that is what I am prepared to do. Your grandson shall be produced before you whensoever and wheresoever may be most convenient to you."

Sir Gilbert took a turn or two in silence. Many memories were at work within him. "No, I will not see the young man just yet. Bring his mother first and let me see and question her. There are several points that will have to be cleared up to my satisfaction before—before—— But I need say no more at present."

"Will you be good enough, Sir Gilbert, to name a time for your interview with my niece?"

"To-morrow at eleven, if that will suit you and her." Then he added under his breath: "Ah, if my faithful, shrewd old Page were only here to help me to investigate this business! The longer I live the more I miss him."

CHAPTER XVII.

SIR GILBERT AND GIOVANNA.

PUNCTUALLY at eleven o'clock next forenoon Captain Verinder, accompanied by his niece, alighted from the fly which had conveyed them from the railway station, at the foot of the flight of semi-circular steps leading to the portico which sheltered the main entrance to the mansion of Withington Chase.

So elated had the Captain been by the result of his interview with Sir Gilbert, that, after detailing to his niece on his return all that had passed between them, he had insisted that she, he and Luigi should all dine together in a private room at a certain popular restaurant (of course at Vanna's expense), when he did not fail to toast Sir Gilbert in a bumper of Clicquot. "Here's to your grandsire, my boy," he said to Luigi as he drained his glass; then, having refilled it, he added: "And here's to the coming lord of Withington Chase, and may he never forget all that his old uncle has done for him!"

A little later he remarked: "I don't think it will be long, my boy, before you come into your inheritance. The old man's breaking up, that's plainly to be seen. I shouldn't be surprised if the next winter tries him severely. He coughed several times during our interview, and a very hollow cough it was."

"And when he is dead and gone, shall I be Sir Luigi Clare?" asked the young man.

"Sir Luigi Clare!" echoed the Captain. "There's a point, now, which I had completely overlooked, while flattering myself that I had forgotten nothing. You will come into the title of course on Sir Gilbert's death. But Sir Luigi Clare will never do. It's altogether too outlandish. We must re-christen you, and that at once."

"Why not make English of the name by turning Luigi into Lewis?" demanded Giovanna.

"The very thing!" replied the Captain. "Which goes to prove that two heads are better than one—especially, my dear, when one of them happens to belong to your sex. Now I come to think, among other inscriptions in the little church at the Chase was one to the memory of a certain Colonel Lewis Clare who fell in some battle or other a long time ago. Now, what more natural," he went on with a meaning look at Luigi, "than that your *father*, instead of naming you after himself, should have preferred to call you after his brave ancestor? Yes, Lewis Clare will do very well indeed—Sir Lewis that will be later on."

Although Giovanna's only visible betrayal of the fact was by a touch of unwonted pallor in her cheeks, she was the prey of a dozen conflicting emotions as the doors of Withington Chase were flung wide and she and her uncle crossed the threshold. "And this was my

husband's home when a boy," was her first thought as her gaze wandered round the entrance hall. "How little I suspected such a thing! There must have been some powerful motive at work to cause him to quit such a roof and to change his name and marry an innkeeper's daughter and seek a new home thousands of miles away. What was that motive, I wonder?"

"Will you come this way, please," said the trained voice of the man in livery a second later, and with that they were presently shown into the same morning-room into which the Captain had been ushered the day before.

"And now, my dear, the crucial moment is at hand," said the Captain to Vanna as soon as they were alone. "I hope you have forgotten none of the points in which I have so carefully coached you up."

"I don't think there is much fear of that. I never forget anything which it is essential that I should remember."

"One last caution, however. Take your time in answering Sir Gilbert's questions, and, above all things, don't get flurried."

"Did you ever know me to get flurried, Uncle Verinder?"

"No, 'pon my word, I don't think I ever did. But then I have known you such a very short while."

At this juncture the door opened and Sir Gilbert entered the room.

The Captain and Vanna both rose as he came slowly forward, his eyes fixed scrutinisingly on his daughter-in-law. Her stately presence and the classic beauty of her features impressed him at the first glance, and therewith came a sudden *bouleversement* of all his preconceived notions of what she would be like. On the spot he acknowledged to himself that he had done her an injustice in his thoughts. After favouring Verinder with a curt nod of recognition, he went up to Giovanna and held out his hand with an air of old-fashioned courtesy. "Am I to presume, madam, that I see before me the widow of my late son, John Alexander Clare?"

"That was my husband's full name, Sir Gilbert—the name he was married in—although, for reasons of his own, he chose to be known to the world simply as Mr. John Alexander."

"To be sure—to be sure." The rich full contralto of her voice sounded pleasantly in his ears. "That was a fact well-known to m at the time. But pray be seated." A wave of his hand included Verinder in the invitation.

He had dropped Giovanna's hand, and there had been a sudden change in his tone as he spoke the last words. The fact was that he had caught the Captain smiling and rubbing one hand within the other with an air of supreme satisfaction, although the other had certainly not intended that he should do anything of the kind, and therewith he had chilled under a sudden breath of suspicion. "What, after all, if I am being victimised by a couple of schemers!" he said

to himself. "And yet that any woman with such a face as that should lend herself—— No, no—I cannot believe it."

Both the others could see that some change had come over him, but were at a loss to guess the cause of it.

"And where was it, madam, if I may be allowed to ask, that you first made the acquaintance of my son?"

"At Catanzaro, Sir Gilbert."

"So—so. Alec's long stay in that, to me, detestable hole of a place is now explained." This was said half to himself. "And where, madam, were you and my son united in the bonds of matrimony?"

"We were married at Malta, at the English church there."

"Ah, then you are a Protestant!"

Giovanna gravely inclined her head. "My father was a Roman Catholic, but my mother was an Englishwoman and a Protestant. My only brother was brought up in the faith of his father, I in that of my mother."

"So much the better—so much the better," ejaculated Sir Gilbert, quite unaware that the words were spoken aloud.

It was a fact that Giovanna had been married at the English church at Valetta, but a prior ceremony had been gone through at Catanzaro, at which a Romish priest had been the celebrant, for Giuseppe Rispani was too good a Catholic, or had the reputation of being one, not to insist upon his daughter being married in accordance with the rites and ceremonies of his own church. That being done, he had raised no objection to accompanying the young couple as far as Malta (to him, indeed, it was a pleasure trip with all expenses paid), there to give away the bride when the ceremony was gone through for the second time. After that Rispani had bidden his daughter good-bye and gone back home, first, however, borrowing a couple of hundred pounds from his English son-in-law in order, as he averred, that he might have the means of carrying out certain much needed alterations and improvements in the *osteria* of the Golden Fig. It is to be feared, however, that the amount in question never got any further than his own pocket.

After the departure of Rispani the newly-wedded couple had made the best of their way to the United States.

To return.

"In that case, madam," resumed the baronet after a brief pause, "you have doubtless been at pains to preserve your marriage certificate."

Giovanna had preserved it, had, in fact, brought it with her this morning. She now produced it, a creased and faded-looking document, from the satchel suspended from her waist-belt, opened it and handed it to Sir Gilbert; who, having adjusted his pince-nez and drawn his chair up to the centre table, smoothed out the certificate upon it and proceeded to read it slowly and carefully from beginning to end,

his lips shaping each word silently as he spoke it to himself. It purported to be, and was a duly certified copy of the entry in the register of the Protestant church at Valetta of the marriage solemnised on the date specified between John Alexander Clare and Giovanna Rispani. It would have been idle to dispute its genuineness, even had there been any inclination, which was far from being the case, on Sir Gilbert's part to do so.

"Madam, the document seems to me in every respect satisfactory," he said gravely as he refolded it and handed it back to Giovanna with a bow.

In return she put into his hands a framed photograph of herself and her husband, taken within a few days of their marriage. "Possibly, Sir Gilbert, this may not be without some interest for you," she said in her quiet, measured tones.

The old man took the photograph and carried it to the window. Scarcely was his back turned before the Captain flashed a look at Vanna which said, "Everything, so far, going on first-rate."

One, two, three minutes were ticked off by the clock on the chimney-piece before Sir Gilbert came back to his chair. His hand trembled a little as he returned the photograph to Giovanna. "Yes, that is Alec to the life," he said. "Poor boy! poor boy!" A deep sigh broke from him as he resumed his seat.

For a little space no one spoke.

It was Sir Gilbert who broke the silence. "Unless I am misinformed, madam, you and your husband found your way to the United States no long time after your marriage?"

"We did, Sir Gilbert. And here a little point occurs to me about which it may be as well to enlighten you. Up to the morning of our marriage I had never known my husband by any other name than John Alexander. The only explanation proffered by him after the ceremony was over was, that he had deemed it best, for certain private reasons, to temporarily drop his surname. As to the nature of his reasons, he never enlightened me, and, indeed, so little curious was I to learn them that, as far as I now remember, the subject was never again broached between us, and after our arrival in America we were known simply as Mr. and Mrs. Alexander."

"Quite right, quite right," said Sir Gilbert. "My son, for family reasons, chose, right up to the time of his death, to keep his surname in abeyance. Well, and what happened after your arrival in the States?"

"We settled in a place called Barrytown in one of the Eastern States, where John (I always called my husband John, Sir Gilbert) thought he saw an opening for the profitable investment of his capital. But he had had no training, and in all business relations was little better than a child compared with the shrewd Yankees in whose midst he had chosen to locate himself. The result was what might have been expected. Instead of making money, at the end of two years he

found himself about four thousand pounds poorer than when he had started in business."

"That was burning his fingers with a vengeance," interpolated the Captain, who had so far maintained a diplomatic silence.

Sir Gilbert glared at him for an instant and then turned his shoulder a couple of inches more towards him. "Proceed, madam, pray proceed," he said blandly to Giovanna.

"By that time our child was born and my health had given way. The doctors told John that the climate of the Eastern States was too inclement for me, and that if I stayed there another winter he would risk losing me. Thereupon he decided to break up our home and go further inland in search at once of a climate that would be likely to agree with me, and of an opening for what was left of his capital which promised better results than his first venture had brought him. Meanwhile I was to go back to Italy, of course taking my child with me, and strive to recruit my health in my native air. As soon as he found himself prospering and had settled where our new home was to be, he would send for me, or fetch me to join him. Well, sir, we parted, my husband seeing me on board ship at New York, little thinking that we should never see each other again. Two letters from him reached me after my arrival at home, in the second of which he told me that he was going to penetrate still further west, or south, I forget which. After that came a silence which has remained unbroken till the present day."

As Giovanna ended, her head sank forward a little and, as if involuntarily, the fingers of her right hand sought and pressed the golden hoop which still graced the third finger of her left hand.

The Captain had been on thorns for the last few minutes for fear lest she should trip, or contradict herself over some point of the narrative which he had so carefully elaborated for her. Now he began to breathe more freely. They were by no means out of the wood yet, but everything had gone so smoothly up till now that it was surely not unreasonable to hope their good fortune would attend them to the end.

"And you never made any effort to trace your husband?" said Sir Gilbert after a pause.

"Sir Gilbert!" exclaimed Giovanna in a tone of genuine amazement. "Please to consider the circumstances of the case. Month after month went by, and every morning on opening my eyes, my first words were, 'Surely I shall have a letter to-day.' But none came. Not till a year had gone by did I give up all hope. Whether my husband was alive or dead, I knew not. What was I to do? America is a big country, and even if I had gone back to New York, I altogether fail to see how it would have been possible for me to trace him after the lapse of so long a time."

"You are quite right, madam. My question was a foolish one. When the year had gone by, what then? Did you never make any attempt to seek out your husband's relatives?"

"Never, Sir Gilbert. It was a matter I did not feel myself at liberty to pry into. Seeing that my husband had never spoken to me about his friends and connections, a certain pride—shall I call it?—withheld me from trying to penetrate a secret which he had not seen fit to share with me."

"At length, however, you saw cause to think differently."

"I was about to explain, Sir Gilbert," said Giovanna with a touch of hauteur which became her well. "Time went on till my son was twelve years old, and then my father died (I had lost my mother many years before), after which event I determined to come to England, where my only brother had been some time settled. I wanted my son to become acquainted with his father's country, and to train him up to become as much like an Englishman as possible. Besides, as time went on it became requisite that he should do something for his living, the whole of my income not amounting to more than a hundred pounds of English money a year. Not to weary you, Gilbert, I will merely add that my son is now, and has been for some time past, earning his living in London as a drawing-master."

"As a drawing-master?" ejaculated Sir Gilbert as if to himself.

"It was quite by accident that my uncle here discovered that my late husband was your eldest son, Sir Gilbert; but after the discovery had been made it became a matter of anxious thought with us whether we should, or should not, proceed any further in the affair. At length we decided that, as a matter of simple justice to you, we were bound to acquaint you with the fact that you had a grandson living of whose existence you had heretofore been unaware, leaving it for you to make whatever use of the knowledge you might deem best."

"*Brava! bravissima!*" ejaculated the Captain under his breath as Giovanna came to an end. "I could not have done it better myself. Not a hitch nor a slip anywhere. What will the old boy do now?"

What the "old boy" did was to take a few silent turns about the room with his hands behind his back, his eyes bent on the carpet, and his head sunk between his shoulders. It was his invariable practice when mentally puzzled or perturbed.

"Madam," he said at length, coming to a halt and planting himself on the hearthrug with his back towards the grate, "nothing could have been more straightforward, or perspicacious than the narrative with which you have just favoured me, and I have no hesitation in saying that to me it seems to bear the stamp of absolute truth. Singularly enough, it happens that I am in a position to enlighten you and set your mind at rest for ever as to the fate of your husband. Poor Alec was killed by the explosion of a steam-boat at a date which, I doubt not, will prove on investigation to have been within a few months of the parting between you and him. No wonder, my dear lady, that you looked in vain for any more letters from him."

"Oh, Sir Gilbert," ejaculated Giovanna, "what an awful fate was his! My poor John! My poor husband!"

She covered her face with her hands and bent her head over the end of the couch on which she was seated. Sir Gilbert turned his back and took up first one ornament off the mantel-piece and then another. The Captain tried to look sympathetic, but failed signally. No long time passed before Giovanna sat up and quietly wiped her eyes. Sir Gilbert had felt sure that she was not the kind of woman to make a scene, or go into hysterics, and he secretly commended her good sense. He now turned and cleared his voice. During the last minute or two he had made up his mind to a certain course.

"My dear madam," he began, "I trust you will do me the favour of bringing your son to the Chase to-morrow forenoon and introducing him to me." He was careful not to say "my grandson."

Giovanna's heart went up with a bound. "I will do so with the greatest pleasure, Sir Gilbert," she replied in her usual composed tones, but her cheeks flushed a little and a sudden light leapt to her eyes.

"There remains one point, however," resumed Sir Gilbert, "about which it may be as well to say a few words, so that, in time to come, no misapprehension in the matter may exist on the part of anyone concerned." Again he cleared his voice. "When my son left England it was by my request. He was deeply involved in debt—not for the first or second time—and he applied to me, as he had done before, to extricate him from his difficulties. This I agreed to do on condition that he would go abroad and stay there till he should have my permission to return. He agreed to the condition and went. At the end of two years he wrote me to the effect that he was desirous of emigrating and pushing his fortunes in the United States, and that if I would pay over to him the sum of six thousand pounds he would sanction the cutting off of the family entail. It was an offer which, after consideration, I decided to accept. I had three other sons then living, and from what I knew of Alec it seemed clear to me that after my death he would simply make ducks and drakes of the property. Accordingly, I went out to Catanzaro, taking my lawyer with me. The six thousand pounds was paid over to my son, and in return he signed certain documents, by the provisions of which he cut himself off from all succession to the family estates. Now, I have only spoken of this fact at so much length because I wish it to be clearly understood that no right of succession to the Clare estates any longer exists, and that it is open to me to will every acre of land and every shilling of which I may die possessed, to whomsoever I may choose to constitute my heirs."

(*To be continued.*)

THE WALTZ.

By J. F. Rowbotham, Author of the 'Diary of Music.'

ACCORDING to Byron, and he has hit the truth pretty nearly, the waltz came into England the same time as the news of the battle of Austerlitz. It was a fresh decoration to the brighter days of the Regency, and shortly after its appearance in London the whole town, or those, at least, who pretended to any degree of fashion, went dancing mad.

But to imagine that the waltz itself dates back to no earlier a period is to make a great mistake. The earliest traces we find of anything approaching to a waltz are two old tunes, of which the date is about the beginning of the eighteenth century. One of them at least is well known in England, as 'Lieber Augustin'—a tune familiar to our grandmothers.

The first of the great masters who condescended to write waltzes was Mozart. He has left us a small collection. If report says true, he was as good a dancer as he was a musician, and knew exactly what waltzers wanted. Accordingly we find in his waltzes harmony of the simplest, melody of the sweetest, and a powerfully marked rhythm.

Beethoven was an execrable dancer, and made symphonies better than he did waltzes; but, for all that, he did not despise the latter, as we may see from the minute pains which he has taken to chronicle his waltzes in the catalogue of his works.

Among Beethoven's contemporaries, however, there was one who excelled the great master in this particular branch of music. This was Reissiger—a man who has been so unfortunate as to lose the glory of his most beautiful composition. 'Weber's Last Waltz,' it is well known, was written not by Weber, but by Reissiger. Singularly enough, people have always refused to acknowledge the true story, and the myth still flourishes in England how Weber wrote his 'Last Waltz' on his death-bed, and how his mourning friends found the precious manuscript under his pillow.

It became the fashion shortly afterwards to have twelve waltzes in the set. The enormous bulk which the waltz attained was said by wags of the day in Vienna to be occasioned by the length of the dinner. At any rate, twelve courses were the legitimate number at a Viennese dinner, and twelve waltzes the orthodox number in a set.

Learned pedants took advantage of the opportunity to air their musical knowledge in so elaborate a species of composition. Schneider forsook his oratorios and made waltzes. Schiedermeyer, who till now had composed exclusively for the church, made his *début* in the ball-room with a set of twelve waltzes and trios. Dummel wrote a set of

twelve waltzes for the opening of the Apollo Saal in Vienna, which for pomp, majesty, and length rival the most sublime of symphonies.

The man who delivered the waltz from the era of bad taste, and restored it to a more convenient simplicity, was a composer whose name can never be handed down to posterity, because it is totally unpronounceable. His name was Krch. Krch reduced the number of twelve waltzes to reasonable dimensions, expressed their melodies in bright and lively airs, and, generally speaking, made the dance a convenient and manageable form.

The most celebrated contemporary of Krch's was Schubert.

A child of the people, a genuine Viennese, Schubert spoke the light language of the waltz as naturally as he sang his lieder. Fully recognising the duty of the dance writer, he is always light, always simple, and shows that he can make the waltz interesting without making it heavy. His waltzes are delightful idylls.

But yet the waltzes of Schubert have never attained any enduring reputation. Why? Because in his time the waltz itself, the actual dance, was as yet imperfectly developed. When Schubert wrote, the waltz was a slow dance, almost like the Bohemian Ländler—a slow, dreamy, rocking sort of dance, so slow in fact that nowadays we take two turns to its one.

It was reserved for the elder Strauss to metamorphose this old rocking waltz into a species of waltz-galop that sends the blood tingling through the veins and sets the whole frame on fire. In the year 1830 Strauss's first waltz was published in Vienna. About this time locomotion began to increase its speed all the world over, and contemporaneously with the invention of the steam-engine we have the invention of the quick waltz.

With Johann Strauss the elder began the golden age of the waltz. Schottisches, polonaises, polkas, Ländlers—all disappeared before the conquering banner of the waltz under Strauss's guidance; his popularity, his empire over the ball-rooms and drawing-rooms of Vienna became unbounded. The whole town worshipped him and his waltzes. Perhaps musician had never been and never will be so popular again.

After a while however a mighty rival appeared on the scene in the person of Lanner, and poor Vienna was thrown into a state of agitation that was pitiable.

The Straussists and the Lannerists threatened to throw the whole fabric of society into confusion. Ball-room was divided against ball-room, partner against partner, father against son. The Gluck and Piccini drama was enacted over again, but this time the issue was not such a tragic one.

If we remember rightly, the celebrated Parisian conflict ended in the ostracism of one of the rival chiefs—Piccini. This was to be expected from the hot-headed Parisians. But the festive Viennese were wiser in their generation. It is a saying, give a Vienna man the choice between a roast pheasant and a roast fowl, and he'll take both.

Thus in fact did Vienna deal with Strauss and Lanner The feud was patched up, and the two waltz kings were enrolled as monarchs of equal power.

Of the two writers Strauss is more especially the man of his day. The gay thoughtlessness, the *bonhomie*, the wild freedom of the Viennese ball-rooms at that time, are faithfully reflected in his music. After Strauss, Lanner's waltzes came like a draught of pure country air, and breathe a tender sweetness which Strauss knew not of.

The Lannerists were the sentimental section of the community. Unrequited attachments, blighted hopes, withered lives, found in Lanner the balm which healed them. Strauss had a different following altogether, and his waltzes tell us who this following was. Do they not speak as clearly as waltzes can speak of epaulettes, stars and ribands, diamonds, rouge, and the bright eyes of pretty women.

When Lanner died, Strauss was left sole master of the scene.

The hero of Vienna resolved to become the hero of Europe, and visited most of the capitals with his orchestra, giving concerts which consisted wholly and solely of dance music. To play dance music in the concert-room is a barbarism which should never have been encouraged; but to be forced to sit still while Strauss's waltzes were played, was like the punishment of Tantalus. Offended art could scarcely have wreaked a more terrible vengeance. Perhaps the punishment was greater than the offence.

As a boy whips up a top, so did Strauss whip up the waltz. From the day when he stepped out into public, he never ceased flogging and lashing till he had goaded the lazy dance to its present dizzy pace.

He has likewise the honour of being the inventor of Titles and Title pages.

Up to his time it has been the practice of composers to have their waltzes without any better distinctive mark than a mere number. But Strauss loved his children too well to let them go into the world unbaptised, so he took to christening one and all of them.

That he consulted the convenience of the public by so doing there is no doubt. The confusion in the world of music was appalling. How could the Vienna young ladies carry 'Op. 236' in their heads all the way from their house to the music shop? But if it were the 'Pearl of the Ocean' or the 'First Love,' the task was immensely simplified.

So Strauss regularly christened his children, and the practice has been taken up with a vengeance by succeeding composers, who now-a-days rummage heaven and earth for euphonious titles. It is doubtful if Strauss ever meant more by his names than a shipowner does when he calls his vessel the 'Boadicea' or the 'Lily of Killarney.' Many of his waltzes bear the name of the Salon where they were first played. Some were christened after the person to whom they were dedicated. Others again are more happily named, such as 'An Antidote against Sleep,' 'Life is a Dance.'

Strauss has had a thousand imitators, but no equal. His peculiar power lay in the art with which he diversified the monotonous waltz rhythm without weakening the swing of the time. A pizzicato note at the strong part of the bar, and a trill at the weak part; a tantalising pause, and then a flight of crisp figures tumbling down from the highest peak of the soprano to the profound depths of the bass, which all the while plods on without a break, giving as firm a rhythm as the anvils in the 'Trovatore'; then a stream of enchanting melody, succeeded by a most delightful piece of banter; everything is calculated to give variety. Strauss's waltzes are musical kaleidoscopes: at each turn there is a novelty.

With Strauss died the electrifying power of his waltzes. The slight pale little man was the spirit of his orchestra. You might know this by the way he conducted. He was like one possessed—sometimes waving his bow frantically in the air, at other times bringing it down on his fiddle, and soaring above all the band; now eagerly listening, now passionately leading. He was convulsed with the spirit of his music. His grimaces were not affectation—he couldn't help them.

When Strauss the elder died, Strauss the younger stepped into his place, and he proved himself no unworthy successor to his sire.

Lumbye and Gungl have been pleasing writers, but of a different style to Strauss. Gungl especially has gone far to revive the spirit of Lanner. His 'Dreams on the Ocean' have all Lanner's sentiment, and breathe the charm of Mendelssohn's romantic overtures.

The pet of the ball-room, the waltz, has always shown the best possible breeding in the chamber and the concert-room. Under the hands of Chopin it has attained the delicacy and grace of a nocturne. Some of Chopin's waltzes are such as elves might dance to. As you play them you fancy at times that you see Puck playing hide and seek round the quavers' tails. Others again have a statelier ring and sound like reminiscences of a Court ball. Rightly did Weber in his 'Invitation to the Dance,' adopt the waltz form as the type of all that is elegant and attractive in dance music. Berlioz, in his ball-room scene in 'Romeo and Juliet,' has made a similar choice. He wanted a form of dance that would conjure up to the hearer the gorgeous pomp of the Capulets, the brilliant crowd of earth-treading stars that make dark heaven light, the passion of Romeo, the timid love of Juliet, and so he chose the waltz.

Bewitching waltz, empress of the ball-room, live on! and evil be the hand that casts the first stone at thee!

Mr. CARTER'S CLIENT

By E. Fairfax Byrrne.

I.

IN a quiet household, one cold bright morning towards the end of September, 1872, a young lady entered the solidly comfortable dining-room of a villa in a Manchester suburb. She was about twenty-eight years of age, but her stout developed figure made her look older; her face was handsome, but of a type eminently prosaic and uninteresting.

It was just ten minutes to eight o'clock, and breakfast was laid. A warm ray of sunlight came round the corner of the window and fell in a bright band on the carpet. Miss Matilda Burgess instantly lowered the blind. Then she walked up to the fireplace, in which nothing cosier than an elegant fall of white muslin ravellings was to be seen, and looked at the clock. When she moved there was a creak to her shoe, and a jangling sound of bracelets and trinkets accompanied her.

The door opened again. This time a lady of about fifty years of age entered; she had a plain but not uninteresting face—one of the pale, self-devoted type, and not without a hint of character in the brows and lips. This was Miss Burgess's "lady companion" and chaperon—a distant relative of her father; and she was called "Cousin Mary."

Hardly had she closed the door behind her, when a hasty patter down the stairs, was followed by the entry of a slim girl of twenty-four; she had a pretty enough face, but it was marred by an expression as discontented as Matilda Burgess's was flatly satisfied. This was her orphan cousin, and ward of her father's—Henrietta Burgess.

"Good-morning, Matilda. Good-morning, Henrietta," said Cousin Mary, kissing the one and extending her hand to the other: "I hope I see you both well. Father not down yet?"

"No fire!" said Henrietta crossly, and drawing her shoulders together with a shiver.

"Father is not down yet, Cousin Mary," said Matilda. "A fire Henrietta! It is not October yet!"

She spoke with an air of surprise, as though fires and dates were necessarily inter-dependent.

"It is warm and sunshiny, my love!" said Cousin Mary soothingly.

"Possibly!—Behind that blind," returned Henrietta grimly.

"The sun fell on the carpet; you know that fades it," said Matilda.

Henrietta made an expressive gesture, and walking to the venetian, pushed herself behind with a great rattle, so as to receive the warm ray it excluded. Cousin Mary, with a tone more depression on her pale face than before, opened the morning paper. It was the *Manchester Watchman*, and was the safe and invariable accompaniment of the Manchester middle-class morning meal. As she raised it, she scattered from beneath a little heap of letters.

"I declare I never remarked that the post had come in," exclaimed Matilda, gathering them up. Henrietta peeped from her concealment behind the blind with a shade more life in her face. "All for father!" said Matilda with monotonous cheeriness. The venetian banged down again, and Henrietta's face disappeared.

Meanwhile, Cousin Mary, not a lash of whose eyes had been changed by the remotest hint of expectation, had opened the sheet.

"Dear me! They really are going to institute a woman's college at Cambridge! In the heart of the University, my dear Matilda!"

"How shockingly forward and bold!" said Matilda, gravely.

A sigh escaped from behind the venetian, and Cousin Mary frowned thoughtfully. At that moment the foot of Mr. Burgess was heard outside. Cousin Mary at once seated herself upon the sofa; and Matilda rang the bell. Henrietta issued disconsolately from behind the blind.

Three minutes late!" said Matilda to herself, looking at the clock. She spoke not in reproof, but in amazement.

The door opened, and in trotted a little pleasant elderly man. He saluted the young ladies on the cheek, and shook the elder lady by the hand. Then he seated himself before the family Bible, a row of servants came in, and "family prayers" began.

Prayers being over, and the servants dismissed, the family gathered to the table. Matilda took the tea-tray, her father the head of the table, and the others each had a side to themselves. From their isolated positions they talked unutterable commonplaces softly to each other, while Mr. Burgess opened his letters. Presently he looked up, beaming.

"Dear me!" he said. "Dear me! Girls!" Matilda and Cousin Mary smiled. The lashes of Henrietta quivered, and a flash of expectation came into her face. "I shall positively have to ask your advice!—to confide in you! A most extraordinary thing has occurred!" Mr. Burgess was handling a common blue business letter as he spoke. Over his spectacles his eyes twinkled rather roguishly.

"Is it that letter, father?" asked Matilda. "You have not sent up your cup for a second supply of coffee."

Mr. Burgess passed the cup automatically, while Henrietta glanced impatiently at her cousin from under her eyelids.

"It is a matter so extraordinary, that I must really take counsel

upon it; and you, ladies, are the best to give it," said Mr. Burgess, tapping the blue letter with his gold-rimmed spectacles, which he took off his nose for the purpose.

"Yes, father dear. But won't you help Cousin Mary to some more bacon?" said Matilda, anxiously.

Henrietta's eyes moved towards her with a quite desperate look.

"You may remember," said Mr. Burgess, disregarding the interruption in his excitement, "a firm of solicitors, most respectable and wealthy, with whom I have had some acquaintance in a friendly way? I allude to Messrs. Carter and Hoskinson, of London."

"I think I recall the name," said Matilda, trying hard to do so, and frowning at the cooling toast.

"A very wealthy firm, and one of eminent respectability. Mr. Carter, the senior partner, is, I may say, a man above the average. He has met the reward of merit. He was elected for Mid-Muddleshire in the Conservative interest, and now sits in the House. He tells me that, owing to the late Session and some additional private business, he has only just been able to secure his holiday, and is about to set out for the South of France, and will prolong his tour to Egypt. His health, it appears, requires a long change."

It was evident to his auditors that Mr. Carter was a great personage, so much manner did Mr. Burgess throw into the recital of these confidences.

"Who is Mr. Hoskinson?" asked Cousin Mary, not at all seeing the drift.

"I know nothing of Hoskinson—nothing at all," said Mr. Burgess, waving his hand grandly; "Carter is my friend—Mr. Carter the M.P. The handwriting of this letter *may* be Hoskinson's, however; indeed, it probably is. It is too intimate a document to have been dictated to a clerk. But it is only signed in Carter's own hand. You see, he is hurried, and on the eve of his departure from England."

"Perhaps you will tell us the contents, Cousin Frederic," said Cousin Mary.

"I am about to do so," said Mr. Burgess, settling his spectacles on his nose and applying himself at length to the blue letter, very much to the relief of Henrietta's impatience. The beginning merely gave the particulars of the proposed journey; then came the kernel of the interest in the shape of the following:—

"Previous to my departure, the Firm has resolved to put into your hands, should your house feel inclined to accept the responsibility, the following interesting case:—Our client Gilbert Staunton, of Ashton Manor, in the county of Muddleshire, Esq., died unexpectedly at his residence some days ago——"

"Father!" interrupted Matilda, "I saw that death in the *Times* Obituary last night."

"Did you, my dear, did you?" said Mr. Burgess with interest. "But allow me to proceed."

"Mr. Staunton was a young man in the pride of life, and was about to contract a marriage with a lady in the same county. As he was apparently in good health, he destroyed his old will and directed us to prepare a new one ready for signature on the day of his marriage. He had given us only the barest preliminary instructions when death put an end to every hope. Consequently he died intestate, and the next-of-kin is the possessor not only of the estates, but the whole of his great personal wealth. The man so enriched by fortune is a far-off cousin named Archibald Staunton, now living, we believe, in a wretched state of poverty in a back street of Manchester. At present we have not been able either to discover or to communicate with him. The fear of fraud prevents our advertising, and the enclosed address is the only clue we have to his whereabouts. If you will accept the case, we desire that you should undertake for us the discovery of the youth, that you should inform him of his good fortune, and during my absence from England make such arrangements as are necessary for him, sparing no expense whatever. You will perceive from my confidence that I am anxious this affair should be in the hands of an experienced solicitor living in the locality. Your immediate reply in the affirmative will greatly relieve my mind before my departure.

"By the way, can you assure us of the perfect respectability and good faith of a firm of solicitors in your neighbourhood named Green & Dawson? We find them duly enrolled, but have a special reason for the enquiry. Kindly treat this letter as confidential, and permit us to remain,

"Faithfully yours,

"CARTER & HOSKINSON,

"*Solicitors.*"

"How romantic and how pathetic!" exclaimed Cousin Mary, her thoughts divided between the disappointed bride and the fortunate heir.

"Why are you telling it to us, uncle?" asked Henrietta, speaking for the first time.

"Because, my dears, if I am to look after this interesting young man, I shall certainly, to begin with, need to bring him here."

"The best bed-room will have to be prepared," said Matilda thoughtfully.

"At present, my love, we have not even found him. If we are successful we shall certainly have need of it."

"He is young!" said Henrietta, over whose face that enlivening look of expectation had come. "But I know" she added after a pause "that he will be hideous—and *dull*."

"My dear, I have formed quite different expectations," said Cousin Mary.

Meanwhile Mr. Burgess hurried away to his office in unusual haste and consulted his head clerk. It was really a very high compliment that had been paid him, for Mr. Carter was a leading man in the world of law. In matters of this kind, a display of flattered feeling was, however, the last policy he was likely to adopt. His head clerk therefore, indited the following dry note, to which Mr. Burgess duly appended his signature.

"DEAR SIR,—I am in receipt of yours of the 24th, and am happy to undertake your commission. Messrs. Green & Dawson have a very high reputation indeed. I speak from personal knowledge.

"Yours very faithfully,

"FRED. BURGESS."

A couple of posts after the dispatch of this letter, a hearty epistle, though a hurried one, reached the office in Manchester. It was from beginning throughout in Mr. Carter's own handwriting.

"DEAR MR. BURGESS,—Your prompt reply relieves me from a burden of anxiety. Many cordial thanks.

"Yours faithfully,

"HY. CARTER."

Meanwhile a delicious suspense and excitement pervaded the house such as Henrietta never remembered before. The best bedroom was always ready and the larder had always something extra in it. Matilda went about all day in her second-best gown, and the very best one had clean lace sewn in, so as to be ready at a pinch at any moment. Henrietta, whose resources were narrow, coaxed something pretty out of Cousin Mary, and furbished up her old gowns into picturesque effects.

From the day when the best bed was first laid out for airing purposes before a roasting fire, she had shyly followed her cousin every morning into the guest-chamber, and watched the preparations with eager anticipation. She was a silent creature and asked few questions; but each day she peeped into the room and saw that the sheets remained spread on the bed, and that the hot-pans were inside to keep in warming.

Nothing had ever happened before that she remembered; and now it really appeared as though something were going to take place. The poor starved life abandoned itself to the thought with utter and complete delight.

One evening the event fell. Henrietta had begun to feel that the freshness of the picturesque gown was wearing off, but she had it on, and Matilda was gorgeous in her best. The three ladies were

assembled in the drawing-room. Everything in that room was ugly and costly; nothing could redeem it into a pretty picture. It was a place with ladies in—that was all. Still Henrietta, in her youth and eagerness was there, and any entering eye would stray to her by nature, and immediately as to the one thing exceptional. She sat on the hearth in the lowest of the prim chairs; her pale cheek contrasted rather remarkably with her dark gloomy eyes—in which a spark from the fire glittered—and her dark ruffled hair. "Untidy hair," Matilda called it, whose locks were screwed into tight and regular plaits.

The ladies were quite silent because there never was anything to talk about. Suddenly wheels were heard in the road; they stopped, and there was a brisk ring.

Henrietta dropped her book on her knee and stared at the door; Matilda settled her collar and arranged her skirt, and put on an indescribable manner—just as though she were sitting for her photograph, Henrietta thought: and Cousin Mary laid down her knitting. Then the door at which Henrietta was staring opened, and Mr. Burgess stood on the threshold with a tall figure behind him, who, to Henrietta's deep throbbing excitement, looked like a shadow from her dreams.

"Mr. Archibald Staunton," announced Mr. Burgess—"my daughter, my niece, my cousin, Miss Mary Simpson."

Henrietta, when her bow was done—and they all bowed simultaneously—sank back in the chair with a soft sigh of amazement. The eyes of the man in the doorway had darted towards her at once, and the eyebrows had gone up in a slight start of interest and surprise.

The girl's ideas of life were founded upon the few novels she had read, and nothing could more resemble the beginning of a romance than this.

Meanwhile Mr. Archibald Staunton had advanced into the room, awkwardly enough if the truth were known. He was exceedingly poorly dressed. Indeed, in the matter of clothing, his plight was nothing short of deplorable. He seemed to stray into the room like a wild creature, making three little bows as he came along, and stumbling with a dazed air into the chair which Cousin Mary pushed towards him. Then his eyes turned towards Henrietta again. The girl's heart beat too wildly for her to be able to move.

"I am sure you are tired with—with—your journey," began Matilda vaguely.

"We are glad to welcome you here," said Cousin Mary with more tact.

The young man, who was certainly good-looking, murmured something indistinctly, and bowed in Miss Simpson's direction.

"Dear, dear! Mary!" exclaimed Mr. Burgess suddenly trotting forwards, "I'm afraid, I'm very much afraid, this is a case of starvation. Our young friend is fainting."

II.

THE guest was judiciously fed and conveyed to his bedroom, and permitted to betake himself between the sheets. This was accomplished with some difficulty, Matilda having a fixed idea that a guest ought to be "amused"—that is, shown the family album, the book of Italian landscapes, and made to listen to her own rendering of "Pluie de Perles" on the piano, and Henrietta's soft piping of "I cannot sing the old songs."

Matilda always had a "programme" of events which she thought "proper," and she was much puzzled and disturbed when it was interrupted.

The guest, however, being at last locked in his chamber, Mr. Burgess related the story of his discovery. First they had judiciously advertised, but not so as to attract adventurers; then they had employed a detective. Finally he had himself undertaken that *rôle* in an amateurish fashion, assisted by the head clerk, and, contrary to his humble expectations, he had been entirely successful; while that giant of skill, Mr. T. of the detective force, had failed to obtain the least trace of the lost heir. The discovery was dramatic. They ran Mr. Staunton to earth at last in a wretched lodging-house in a back slum. Without sending up any announcement, they penetrated into an upper storey and—"so shy, my dear ladies, was our young hero"—they were almost driven to obtaining an entry by force into the garret wherein Mr. Archibald Staunton concealed his poverty and misfortunes. Mr. Burgess described the feeble condition in which they found him, reposing on a wretched bed with a cup of water and a dry crust standing untasted on the table. Upon their intrusion, Mr. Staunton had started up with an air of defiance, gazing at them silently, not in fear, but in indignant reproach.

"I had," said Mr. Burgess to his entranced auditors, "much ado to break my news gently enough to our friend. In truth, I have at present not informed him of the extent of his good fortune."

"What did you say, uncle?" asked Henrietta breathlessly.

"I told him my name and said that I was the bearer of some good news; and that if he could make it convenient to accompany us, I believed I could make it worth his while to do so."

"And what did he say?"

"He looked at me with sorrowful reproach and exclaimed: 'Do you offer a Staunton charity?' I assured him this was not the case, but that I knew of something to his advantage, and that I saw my way to setting him on his legs again without his being beholden to anyone."

"And what happened next?"

"Then, my dear, after a little further pressure, we induced him to step into a cab and accompany us here."

"Has he brought his trunks?" asked Matilda.

"My love, he has no trunks; nor—ahem—any other clothes than those he stands up in."

Matilda leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes for a second. Henrietta, on the contrary, opened her dark gloomy orbs wider and stared at the fire.

"I trust, Cousin Frederic," said Cousin Mary, "that you have made some arrangement with regard to the young man's habiliments. He appeared to me—though I confess a feminine eye cannot quite gauge these matters—to be scarcely attired up to his—to *our* position."

"I have made such arrangements, Cousin Mary."

Mr. Burgess closed his lips as though to repress further speech; but he thought better of it, and continued in a burst of confidence:

"My head clerk has been commissioned to send my tailor—my own tailor—round early to-morrow morning to take his measurement. Meanwhile he will be accommodated with a ready-made suit. I have told the tradespeople to spare no expense, but to be prepared to provide such an outfit as will be suitable to a young man of position and of great wealth.'

Henrietta slept little that night. Even her uncle's prose, and the ready-made suit, and Cousin Mary's solicitude, had been unable to divest her uncle's story of its element of romance and mystery. As to the appearance of Mr. Staunton, that was indelibly impressed on her mind even though he had only been in her presence some fifteen minutes. He was above the middle height and slender in build; his hair was dark and curly; he wore a thick moustache and though his face was disfigured by a beard of two or three days' growth, she found his appearance handsome and striking. Circumstances lent it a reflected glory. That reproachful "Do you offer a Staunton charity?" had marked him in her estimation as a hero. Pity assisted the work. He had suffered. There were, indeed, traces of very severe deprivation in his countenance, and no graceful entry into a room could have appealed to her as did those wild eyes and that feeble stumble.

Still commonplace life—and in this house of uncompromising prose even romance lost half its lustre—went on as usual, and claimed the hero for itself. Next day, she peeped from the door of her bedroom to see all that went on. *He* had not come down to breakfast, but a most dainty little meal had been sent up to him on a tray, which Matilda prepared with her own hands. And early in the morning, a couple of men arrived in a cab, and were shown upstairs the back way. Henrietta watched them on their passage to the best bedroom. The first man was a most respectably clad shopman, carrying a bag; the second was, presumably, his subordinate; he carried a larger bag, and Henrietta detected a long piece of measuring-tape hanging out of his pocket, and the head of a large pair of scissors, and a little bundle of material with chalk marks on it, and a little forest of pins on the lapel of his shabby coat. But even the unconquerable prose of this

procession as it passed along the landing, and vanished in the best bedroom, could not dispel the romantic dream which was beginning to burn in the little inexperienced heart.

It was lunch-time before he appeared. He came into the drawing-room where Matilda was awaiting him with a company air calculated to confound even the most accomplished frequenter of society. He was shaven, well-dressed, composed in bearing, but very white and worn and weak. He bowed courteously, and then advanced shiveringly to the fire. Cousin Mary took the poker and stirred it into a wild blaze. He thanked her with a silent bow. Matilda seized the family album, placed it on a small table by his side, and opened it at the portrait of the deceased Uncle John Simpson, the stockbroker. He marked his appreciation by a second silent bow, and turned away to the fire. Matilda glanced unsteadily towards the Italian sketches, and then at the piano, where the "Pluie de Perles" was ready on the stand; but Cousin Mary seized the opportunity afforded by the guest's abstraction to pluck her by the skirt, and get her to sit down. Hints and frowns could not, however, bring Matilda any further than to cause her to relinquish one item of her programme in favour of another.

"Will you sing, Henrietta?" said she, with a company air.

"Certainly not," replied Henrietta, with very natural sharpness.

The guest by the fire raised his head, and held her eyes for several perceptible seconds.

"Thank you," murmured he.

Cousin Mary looked down at her knitting with a little smile, and the slightest touch of colour in her cheek. The contagion of romance had reached her from the agitated heart of the young girl; she had perceived the prolonged gaze, and believed she detected the dawning of a love affair.

Two things combined to render intercourse with the guest extremely difficult; first, his absence of mind and cold reticence; second, Matilda's terrifying deportment. At lunch Mr. Burgess was necessarily absent, and the guest remained unconquerably, proudly silent. Matilda suddenly inquired after the beauties of the Staunton estate. He glanced at her with a red startled look, which caused Cousin Mary to press her foot under the table.

"My cousin thinks—*knows* of your connection with the late Mr Gilbert Staunton, of Ashton Manor," said Henrietta, with pretty apologetic eagerness.

"Just so," said he, absently, but with an interested glance in her direction. Then he appeared struck by something, laid down his knife and fork, and gazed at her inquiringly. The others he ignored. "The *late* Mr. Gilbert Staunton!" he exclaimed. "What does *that* mean?"

Henrietta flushed an agonising red, and, like reflected sunlight, the same colour appeared on the faded cheek of Cousin Mary, and the firm fat contour of Matilda's. All three recalled the fact that

Mr. Burgess had not yet imparted the story of his good fortune to the heir.

"My cousin *thought* she saw the death of Mr. Staunton in the *Times* obituary a few days ago," faltered Henrietta.

"A mistake," returned Archibald Staunton drily; "what she saw was probably the advertisement of his marriage. I have known," he added with unexpected expansiveness, "the advertisements to get wonderfully mixed up, and a birth to appear amongst the deaths."

After this Cousin Mary determinedly took the lead in the conversation; she addressed herself to Henrietta and inquired after her little interests—the Sunday School, the Bazaar, the shopping at the Stores, and Mr. Charles Hamer's grand concerts.

"I myself am musical," said the heir suddenly, and directing that full searching glance upon Henrietta's face.

"Are you? I am so glad!" said she shyly.

"Why?"

"Oh, because I too am musical!" she tripped out, blushing.

He held her eyes for full two seconds.

"We have season tickets for Mr. Hamer's concerts," explained Cousin Mary, delighted to have found a safe topic.

"Indeed! and do you attend regularly?"

"Henrietta does," said Cousin Mary; "we have seats in the second row to the left—a couple of seats. Miss Burgess and I are not very regular in attendance, being not great enthusiasts."

"It is too close to the orchestra," said the young man frowning.

"But," said Matilda, "you can see all your friends come in. Are *you* a regular attendant, Mr. Staunton?"

"Madam," returned Mr. Staunton, with that red severity of aspect he had shown before, "my circumstances do not permit it."

And he sank gloomily to his plate again.

Conversation was once more crushed, and existence began to assume to Cousin Mary the aspect of a series of knots. What was to be done after lunch? Henrietta solved the problem.

"I am going into the garden," said she, taking a garden hat from the stand in the hall as they passed through it, and darting a glance of defiance at Matilda as she spoke.

"Allow me to accompany you," said the young man quickly.

They went out together. Henrietta showed him the shrubs and the flowers, and the little greenhouse. Not even the fact of Matilda's proximity—she was awaiting their return in the drawing-room—could prevent the inevitable naturalness of the interview when the pair found themselves amongst the colours and scents of the greenhouse.

"Do you know," said Mr. Staunton, as they stood together staring into the cup of an autumn lily—"do you know, ever since I set eyes on you in that first moment when I entered the drawing-room——"

"Yes?"

"I have been haunted by the feeling that—*we have met before.*"

"Oh, how strange!" returned Henrietta, while the lily swooned before her.

"Why! How?"

"Because—I have—felt the same."

He looked at her penetratingly.

"*Where* have we met before?" said he.

"I—don't know."

She stretched her hand out nervously to the lily. He did the same; and their fingers touched.

"Was it—do you think—in a *dream?*"

She reflected. That is to say, the smell of the lily, the dazzling cup, the touching fingers, the flowers, the voice, the strangeness and romance, carried her starved existence away on a stream of delicious sensation.

"I believe it was," she faltered presently.

"I *know* it," he returned with masculine decision; "but—do you believe in such things?"

"I'm afraid I ought not; but that I shall have to!"

Matilda began the "Pluie de Perles" from the drawing-room. They started apart.

That evening Mr. Burgess called the heir into his private study and told him the truth. He came back from the interview with a subdued excitement in his face and fire in his eyes; and he made straight across the room to where Henrietta sat.

"I have just heard my news," said he simply, sinking down on a lounge beside her.

Henrietta looked at him quickly with soft subdued eyes.

"I'm almost sorry you have left off believing yourself poor and forlorn," she murmured hurriedly.

He pondered the words with an air of pleased surprise.

"It makes a great change to me," said he thoughtfully. "But my poor cousin! In such a moment one's mind dwells on him. A promising life cut short! A bride disappointed!"

Henrietta turned quickly away, her eyes filling with tears. She repeated the sentiment that had escaped his lips to Matilda and Cousin Mary upstairs.

"My dear," said Cousin Mary, taking her tenderly in her arms, "the young man is as good as he is handsome."

III.

In spite of Mr. Staunton's admirable sentiment and the elegant black with which Mr. Burgess's tailors provided him, he showed no disposition to make the period of mourning a severe one. Indeed, he could hardly be expected to take the conventional view of a death

which affected him in no way, save to enhance his happiness. And thus a series of dissipation and delight was initiated which changed the dull days of Henrietta to a rainbow hue.

Mr. Burgess, of course, reported the success of his undertaking to the London firm. He received a letter from Mr. Carter's confidential clerk to say that, in the absence of Mr. Carter and the unfortunate illness of Mr. Hoskinson, the settlement of the Ashton Manor estate was a little in abeyance, but that Mr. Carter would probably return earlier than was intended, and that if Mr. Burgess would undertake the immediate affairs of Mr. Archibald Staunton it would be a convenience to the London partners. Mr. Burgess, who saw that a good thing was likely to fall into his hands, undertook the matter with alacrity. And, indeed, very little expense was involved in it. He had but to explain the young man's worldly position to secure from the tradesmen credit to any amount.

Mr. Staunton's taste in amusements revolutionised Mr. Burgess's household for the time. He preferred balls and theatres to bazaars and concerts; indeed, in spite of his musical talent, he did not attend the latter. A delightful time ensued. Mr. Staunton hired a set of handsome chambers near Mr. Burgess's house, and had them luxuriously furnished; indeed, he soon showed that a graduation in poverty by no means disables one from the profession of wealth. His taste proved fastidious, admirable, and expensive.

Mr. Burgess he made his confidential friend, talking to him of his intentions with great openness. He proposed remaining in Manchester until Mr. Carter's return from Egypt, when he would at once proceed to London to meet his lawyers, and afterwards travel abroad to gratify his repressed tastes by seeing the world. Finally he hinted at marriage and a domestic settlement on the estate at Muddleshire. Seeing that his attentions to Henrietta continued, Mr. Burgess was well pleased to hear it.

For the next few weeks time flew on golden wings to Henrietta. From being the dependent of her uncle she was promoted to quite a different set of feelings and experiences. He had always been kindly and indulgent, but now he was lavish; she had all the pretty dresses she could possibly desire, and every wish was gratified almost before it was expressed. Meanwhile two months sped away, and yet the courtship did not advance beyond the point with which it had, in reality, begun. Mr. Staunton never got beyond "tender nothings"; and there even were moments when he was more attentive to Matilda than Cousin Mary altogether liked. But these were but motes in the broad beam of sunlight. The romance of her position engrossed Henrietta, and she knew and saw nothing save her unlooked-for happiness.

There appeared, however, every prospect of the affair coming to its legitimate conclusion shortly. Mr. Staunton had been peculiarly attentive for several days, and experts in these tender matters were

looking forward to a coming ball as the occasion when the lover would probably put an end to his delicious uncertainty.

The evening arrived. Henrietta looked lovely in a new and admirably planned ball-dress, which set off the rather original character of her beauty to perfection. A good many claimed the pleasure of dancing with her. But Mr. Staunton had taken the precaution of securing four waltzes and two square dances beforehand —the latter with the avowed intention of sitting them out. He danced very little indeed with anyone else, but seemed to prefer watching the brilliant happiness of Henrietta, who displayed a hundred charms which had hitherto remained unsuspected. The waltzes and one square dance had been executed and the last square dance was approaching. Something in Henrietta's heart and in the bearing of her lover, told her that this would bring the decision of her fate. She was seated in a small ante-room with her last partner, to whom she was according, if truth were known, a rather distracted attention.

Suddenly Matilda appeared in the doorway, and looked at her with the rather meditative air which of late had characterised her.

The fiddles were already tuning-up for the dance, and Henrietta's sensitive cheek flushed with uneasy feeling under Matilda's inspection. She withdrew; and a moment afterwards Mr. Staunton's form filled the doorway. He advanced towards her.

"This is *our* dance," said he with a slight stress on the word.

A glance, a smile, and a bow from Henrietta granted it, and her late partner left them alone.

"We are going to sit it out, you know," said Mr. Staunton eagerly; "but not here. Here we should be interrupted."

He led the way to a small conservatory and showed her a seat behind some ferns where they could be concealed from the observation of others; and, indeed, all the guests were crowding into the ball-room. The sound of the music accompanied their voices agreeably. She seated herself, and he took a place by her side.

"I have had a delightful time in Manchester," he began.

"I am glad it has been pleasant to you," said she.

"No time in my life has been brighter," said he; "before that eventful morning when Mr. Burgess called on me, I—had not met *you*."

No answer to this could be expected or required. She looked down and played with her fan.

"It has been an inestimable privilege, and now——"

"Yes?"

"*Now*—I am going away."

A light shadow of surprise passed over Henrietta's face. But after all she had known it.

"I shall have to exchange happiness that I know of for pleasures that at best are doubtful."

"You are going abroad?"

"Yes. I have always spoken of my intention of doing so to Mr. Burgess. I received a letter to-night that showed me I must run up to London to-morrow. I have to leave early. May I beg you to keep the fact to yourself for a day or two?"

"Anything you tell me I shall regard as sacred."

"Thank you. Before I go, I should like to make sure——" He paused, seemingly in emotion. Henrietta's heart began to beat suffocatingly. She saw nothing but her fan and her small hand holding it, and all her consciousness was merged in the arm which his coat brushed. It was at this moment that Matilda again appeared at the door of the conservatory, and peered towards the place where they were seated, with that curious, perplexed, meditative air which she was apt to assume if the programme went wrong; then she retired. Henrietta, she could not conceive why, felt a chill pass over her.

"Your sister is ubiquitous, I think," said Mr. Staunton angrily.

"My sister!" said Henrietta, who at that moment had no desire to claim a closer relationship with Matilda than was necessary; "she is not my sister."

"*Not* your sister!" repeated Mr. Staunton with a particularly blank expression.

"No," said Henrietta, "she is my cousin."

"Oh—h!" There was relief in the tone. "She is not then the daughter of your admirable father Mr. Burgess?"

"Mr. Burgess is not my father. He is my uncle," said Henrietta with a smile. Then with an odd impulse which she could not have explained, but which to the end of her life she thanked Heaven for, she added:—"I am merely a poor dependent on my good uncle's very kind bounty."

The moment she had said it her young heart swelled with a sentiment of affection and gratitude towards the good old man whose house, dull as it was, was her home.

"Is that so? Indeed!" said Mr. Archibald Staunton twirling his moustache thoughtfully.

"That is so," said Henrietta, while her heart went suddenly very cold and quiet.

There was an interval of silence; the square dance was rapidly coming to an end.

"I am engaged to Miss Smith for the next dance," said Mr. Staunton presently.

"And I to Mr. Robinson," retorted Henrietta firmly.

Another pause, during which it seemed to Henrietta that all the glow and spring went out of the flowers and left them poor and limp. She had edged away from the touching coat.

"Miss Henrietta!" said Mr. Staunton rather nervously.

"Yes?" said Henrietta in as chill a voice as she could assume.

"This conversation which we began, and which your cousin interrupted——"

"Yes?"

"Will you allow me to continue it later?"

"If you wish. I believe you go to London to-morrow."

"I might accompany you home—I might call to-morrow—I might put off going."

"As you wish."

His manner was disturbed and nervous. He put out his hand, seized hers and stooped to kiss it. Henrietta never knew why she snatched it away and stood up.

The dance came to an end, and the Burgess party got into a hired carriage and went home. Mr. Staunton did not appear to escort them, nor even to take his leave of them. Matilda stared meditatively at Henrietta all the way home, and Henrietta gazed out of the window. All night she lay awake. Did she doubt him or did she not doubt him? Had it been an illusion, and was it already broken? The question was not very easily decided, for her mind was in confusion.

The next day passed heavily enough; and Matilda nearly drove the girl distracted by the slow, puzzled, meditative stare which she fastened perpetually on her face. No one called at the house at all until the evening; and then, while they were all, including Mr. Burgess, seated in the drawing-room, a ring came at the bell.

Henrietta's white face flushed crimson.

The opening of the door was followed by a heavy solid tread along the hall. The drawing-room door was flung wide, and the servant announced:—"Mr. Archibald Staunton!"

For one moment the girl's heart leapt with relief; the next it sank down to ashes and despair.

A kindly, gentlemanly-looking man of about forty, with a clean-shaved face and grey hair, stood on the threshold and glanced round on the circle with a grave commiserating expression.

"Why! Dear me! Bless my soul!" cried Mr. Burgess, starting up and staring at him.

"I come straight from Messrs. Carter & Hoskinson of London," said the stranger with a serious air; "*I* am Mr. Archibald Staunton."

For the next two days Henrietta went about her duties with a white set face; she relaxed nothing of her activity, and studied the utmost moderation and gentleness in her manner. Matilda, on the contrary, seemed a prey to some nervous disorder. No one, not even Cousin Mary, could find an opening for questioning Henrietta or even to offer her sympathy. As to what had happened, it took a long time for the household to comprehend the extent of the fraud that had been practised upon them, as also upon the firm of Messrs. Carter & Hoskinson in London.

Mr. Carter had been induced by his head clerk, in the hurry of departure, to append his signature to a long document of which the

only words he could see were those he himself had dictated; viz., an account of his coming journey, and a request for information respecting the firm of Messrs. Green & Dawson. The reticent reply of Mr. Burgess had unwittingly furthered the clerk in his fraud and secured him immunity from suspicion. Mr. Hoskinson's illness—and he was much of an invalid—had both created and extended the opportunity, and the skill of the brilliant accomplice in Manchester had carried the scheme out with effect. Mr. Carter's anxiety had been caused by certain other indications of fraud and mystery which he had failed to unravel, or to trace to their right source—hence his inquiry respecting Messrs. Green & Dawson. And, finally, it was Mr. Hoskinson's recovery and return to the office which gave the signal to the two adventurers to close their brilliant game.

During the two days following the appearance of Mr. Staunton, he remained in the house: and the business conferences between the two gentlemen were too frequent for the sentimental side of the affair, as it touched Henrietta, to be dwelt on. But after two days a letter arrived for her. Everyone recognised its importance, and it was handed to her across the breakfast-table in silence.

In a silence as complete, she broke the seal, perused it and handed it to her uncle. It ran as follows:—

"Dear Miss Henrietta,—By the time this reaches you, I shall be safe out of England, so do not be anxious upon my account. Pardon me for my necessary defection. Allow me to assure you now of the devotion and admiration with which I regard you—a full expression of which you missed the night of that too delightful ball. But my intentions were honourable. I was about to entreat you to elope with me with a view to immediate marriage, when your cousin's appearance cut me short. Do not blame me, Henrietta! The situation was too hot for me. Being in extraordinary need of funds, I had previously engaged myself to her, and secured from her the amount necessary for your and my sustenance on that never-to-be-realised wedding-tour. My heart was all *yours*. I hasten to assure you of my deep preference.

"As a hint of the reality of my admiration, and as a slight apology for my conduct, allow me to tell you that I am *glad* your little confession of poverty and dependence saved you from linking your innocent life to that of an incorrigible rascal. I am not all bad, Henrietta. You have touched the little spot of goodness I possess, and this is the sign of it. Do not either be altogether ashamed of your lover. I am a gentleman born. I am your equal; but unfortunate circumstances had reduced me to the position of a clarionet player in Mr. Charles Hamer's grand orchestra. I feared your recognition. On my part, how could I have missed seeing, week by week, the pretty face in the second row of the audience?

"A packet of tradesmen's bills will be found in the base of my

mantlepiece. As Mr. Burgess recommended me to their services, how can I be responsible for them? Adieu! 'Twas brief, 'twas heavenly, and 'tis past!'

"Your devoted admirer,

"ARCHIBALD."

"Matilda," said Mr. Burgess sternly, "what is this allusion to you?"

"Father," said Matilda between her helpless sobs—"indeed he had engaged himself to me: and——"

"Well?" said Mr. Burgess with a severity hitherto unknown to him.

"He induced me to sell out and give him the £500 of Consols that belonged to my mother, and which you placed in my hands."

Mr. Burgess tapped on the breakfast-table with his gold-rimmed glasses a few moments in silence. At the bottom of the good indulgent heart was a stern sense of justice.

"Matilda," said he, gently, but firmly, "the man was your cousin's lover. It was acknowledged and talked of in the house. You must take the consequences of your own act."

No one spoke to or looked at Henrietta. She sat with white face and lowered lashes. She made no sign whatever. But her uncle's words seemed to throw over her an indefinite feeling of protection, and to soothe her outraged heart. Later on in the day she herself came to him.

"My dear, my dear!" said he, taking off his glasses to rub his eyes.

"Uncle," said she, very gently, "have I *any* money of my own?"

"A little, my dear; a few hundreds."

"Then give it to me, and let me pay for my own education at that college in Cambridge Cousin Mary read of in the paper."

"My dear niece! the protection of a home——"

"Uncle," said the girl, interrupting him very gently, "the protection of a home has not saved me. Let me go where I can learn to judge about things, and to protect myself."

That was all she ever said. But she had her way. And after a steady, though not very brilliant career at college, she won her certificates, and secured a position of governess to the motherless, only child of the owner of Ashton Manor, in Muddleshire.

And that is how it happened that Henrietta Burgess became the happy wife of Archibald Staunton after all.

LETTERS FROM SOUTH AFRICA.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "The Bretons at Home," "In the Lotus Land," etc., etc.

East London. *April*, 1893.

The Falls of Howick.

CARE AMICE,—My last letter was concluded at sea. The blue waters of the ocean surrounded us, the clear and wonderful skies of South Africa were above us; the creatures of the deep—one can hardly call them monsters, since neither sea serpents nor hippopotami were amongst them—crossed our path, or we crossed theirs; probably they would think the latter, asking themselves, these ocean monarchs, by what right we invaded their dominions. But with them also discretion was the better part of valour; they did not show fight; the dolphins and the whales, with a lash of the tail, would sail away where neither shot nor spear could touch them; no sword-fish thrust his weapon into our sides, leaving behind him a memento of baffled vengeance; gallantly our mighty vessel went her way unopposed by any contending element. I cannot say she rode upon the waves, for no waves were visible. It is literally the case that we have not seen a wave, scarcely a ripple, since we left the shores of old England. This to some people con-

stitutes the charm of the voyage: and this is why the voyage to the Cape is so much praised; once past Madeira, you can almost always depend upon calm waters. But to everyone in search of health it becomes a case of Smooth Seas *versus* Tropics and relaxing weather, beautiful though that weather and those tropics may be. To me the discomfort of the Tropics far outweighed the calmness of the ocean.

The long low coast of South Africa was ever in view as we sailed westward; full of beauty and repose. This broke the monotony of the journey and gave us a very good idea of the country; at least as far as the coast is concerned. We steamed so near that houses and forests, hills and valleys, were distinctly visible. The fires at night were glorious, acres of land frequently blazing and flaming away; beautiful holocausts without a victim. Sometimes these fires are accidental, but occasionally they are of deliberate intent, to clear the land without the trouble of manual labour. Still the sight with all its beauty was always more or less painful in the uncertainty of its origin; one never knew whether it was not bringing desolation in its splendid ravages.

And so day and night succeeded each other, and early one fine morning we found ourselves at anchor in Algoa Bay. In front of us uprose the town of Port Elizabeth in all its glory. It has no harbour at present, and the jetties are not within reach of such vessels as the *Dunottar Castle*. Everyone has to land in steam tugs, and almost all cargo is discharged by lighters.

Port Elizabeth is very flourishing and industrious, and is said to be the envy and jealousy of East London, which lies further west, at the mouth of the famous Buffalo river. As far as I can see, you cannot draw any comparison between them. They differ from each other as much as the East End differs from the West End of our own metropolis. At a first glance, the town impresses one as favourably as any town in South Africa, Durban perhaps excepted, whose matchless situation it is said will stand the ordeal of any comparison. That we have yet to see and to prove.

Here we were to leave the *Dunottar*, travel overland *viâ* Grahamstown and King Williamstown to East London, and there rejoin our vessel, which would take us on to Durban. It was now Saturday morning early, and we were due at East London on Tuesday morning. This would enable us to rest the whole of Sunday at Grahamstown. It is pleasant in travelling to make the Seventh Day a day of rest, whenever this is possible.

There is something which at once prejudices you in favour of Port Elizabeth. A brightness of atmosphere; an orderliness about the place, which is clean and well built, and seems quiet withal and self-respecting: as if its inhabitants were not utterly given up to the race for wealth. True, we landed in the early morning, before the business and bustle of the day had commenced, whilst many were still slumbering who yet were not sluggards; and so everything

was in repose; banks and stores were still closed and shuttered. The jetty was wide and well supplied with cranes and tramway rails: all an admirable piece of workmanship. Even from here the public buildings looked substantially built and imposing. At the other end of the jetty was a large Custom-House on one side, and a new railway station on the other, that, in everything but size would compare favourably with any of its rivals in England. Some will say Why not? but South Africa is a new country: it has taken England long years to reach her present state of luxurious perfection.

Port Elizabeth is built on rising ground, which adds very much to its charm. This we noticed even before landing. At the end of the jetty a long sloping hill stretches away in front of you, the distance crowned with churches and other imposing buildings. Unfortunately this was all we were able to see of the place; a distant view, a mere impression. Our train was to start half an hour after landing, and as trains do not run here as often as they run in England, we were not able to wait for another. We had a long journey of some ten or twelve hours before us ere reaching Grahamstown.

The lightness and brightness which characterised Port Elizabeth, the clear and pleasant atmosphere, perhaps may have something to do with the general industry and prosperity of its inhabitants. It is so much easier to work successfully under sunny skies.

We did not land alone. Not a few of the remaining passengers were bound for Port Elizabeth, returning either from England or from Cape Town. One of these, a gentleman who seemed to have control of everything and everyone in the place, was good enough to take us in hand, and quickly passed us through the ceremony of the Custom-House; but we had left most of our baggage on board and had nothing to declare. When all was over, porters shouldered our traps and disappeared like lightning across the road into the station. Had we been alone, we might have supposed—so sudden and quick were their movements—that these natives had performed a raid upon us, just as in the old days they would come down marauding upon towns and settlements. But it was all right.

H. had taken a leaf out of my book and landed with the most severe headache of his life. Fortunately we had the carriage to ourselves, and I built him a comfortable couch with bags and rugs; but he seemed so ill that I felt anxious and wondered if it would prove more than headache. It is my unhappy way to look rather on the dark side of things, in spite of doctors' assurances of a "sanguine temperament;" but I think that such a mental condition must come to all who have passed through years of unusual sorrow and trouble. Added to this a phrenologist was once good enough to say that I had not "sufficient hope to be constitutionally happy:" and ever since I have wished for a large measure of hope in all those in whom I am specially interested; to every one of them a Pandora's

Ostrich Farm.

box as a life treasure. To look on the bright side of things, to hope for the best under all circumstances, is half the battle of existence—and half its success.

We much regretted our short stay at Port Elizabeth. I have an idea that we should have liked the place exceedingly, and it is said that many nice people live here. But necessity has no law. It would never do to arrive at East London on Tuesday evening instead of Tuesday morning, only to find that the *Dunottar*, with nearly all our worldly goods, had started just twelve hours before on her way to Durban. So, having fulfilled our prophecy and dropped your letter into the Post Office, with a wish for its safe and speedy delivery, we presently steamed out of the railway station.

Of this long and monotonous journey I have not very much to record; and yet to us it was exceedingly interesting, so unlike was it to one's ordinary European experiences. Neither in England nor in any other part of Europe do we possess anything approaching it. It is difficult to describe, almost impossible to conceive the effect upon the mind of these immense, unlimited stretches of country. I have heard of people bursting into tears as they gazed, exclaiming, "There is so much of it!" In truth one seems lost in an infinity of space, when contemplating these boundless tracts: and if this little spot of earth has such an effect upon us, what about all that "eternity of space" by which we are surrounded? One feels as the dove must have felt when she hovered over the wide waste of the waters of the Deluge and found no resting-place for her foot. We lose our own identity and seem to be swallowed up in "a whirlwind of space and ages."

I have said that the journey was monotonous, but though there was a certain amount of sameness about it, there was no monotony; it was interesting from beginning to end. Happily H. after a good sleep woke up with headache gone, altogether himself; so the anxious clouds rolled away, and we were able to enjoy without drawback all that might come before us. Once more the lesson was read to look on the bright side of life.

The train was very slow and deliberate, but this in South Africa for the most part goes without saying. They have nothing to hurry for on these occasions, and accept life as it comes. To us who wanted to take everything in leisurely, this condition of things was pleasant and agreeable; but, often repeated, must grow wearisome.

On first leaving Port Elizabeth the train stopped rather frequently. There were such stations as Zwartskops—no doubt a satire upon the heads of the natives; and Red House—which we looked for in vain: just as in England if a house is named the Poplars or the Cedars, you may be quite sure there is not a poplar or a cedar within a hundred miles of it: and the most quarrelsome and unchristian people it was ever my lot to encounter, called their abode the *Agapemone*: all part and parcel of the eternal *un*fitness of things.

After the absent Red House came Coerney, by which time we had done some forty miles of the journey.

This place is said to be quite civilised, and has an hotel, fairly frequented, as good sport is to be found in the neighbourhood, and the once plentiful elephants still pay it angels' visits. In this neighbourhood also is the wonderful Zuurberg Pass, with an hotel at the very summit. How we longed to make the ascent cannot be told. Three miles of dense bush country leads you to the foot of the mountains: and then a gradual ascent of seven miles brings you to the inn, 3000 feet above the level of the sea. The views as you ascend are rich and varied, hills and forests, valleys and occasional water lending all their enchantment to the scene. From the summit you may gaze over a marvellous extent of country to the far-off Indian Ocean, sleeping under molten skies. All this we had to leave unseen, simply because time would not stand still. Such is the malignant crossness of events, and such the inevitableness of nature's laws.

More often than not, we found that the station was a solitary building in the midst of a vast and desolate tract of country, and one wondered what it was doing there, and why it existed at all, and where those who alighted disappeared to. But very often no one got out, and no one got in. These vast tracts of bush are biding their time. Where railways come civilisation must follow, towns and cities must spring up, and presently vast populations arise. So will it be with South Africa, when you and I, Care Amice, shall long have passed into the unseen and the unknown.

What pleased us most in this journey was the aspect of the country. Its boundless extent; its wonderful desolation and solitude; the distant hills that now and then bounded the horizon, curious in form, as nearly all the South African hills and mountains are. But above and beyond all was the wealth and luxuriance of the wild, uncultivated vegetation, which here grew, neither let nor hindered by the hand of man. For hours and hours we passed through such country, which seemed to grow and flourish only for its own pleasure, and for the birds that flew from tree to tree: small paroquets with their red bills and lovely plumage; or more gorgeous kingfishers and other birds, that looked, as I have already remarked, like magnificent fragments of intensified rainbow flashing about. I can think of no better comparison.

Very often the country seemed one succession of billowy undulations, as if a mighty ocean had once had its home there, and had now retired or dried up, leaving its impression upon the earth for ever.

The trees were wonderful; rather bushes than trees, perhaps, but full of grace and beauty. Trailing creepers seemed to hang from the boughs, full of gorgeous colouring. Beneath them was an undergrowth of smaller bushes and flowering shrubs; the wild geranium flaming up in trees of immense circumference, the pelargonium

conspicuous. Wild flowers of every description abounded. All this wealth and wildness never ceased. Anything more beautiful could not be imagined. The eye was almost surfeited with beauty, for the charm was never-ending.

In such a journey monotony was impossible; it yielded the greatest and purest delight.

Here and there tracts seemed to have been cleared. Occasionally a farmhouse appeared on the scene, only to make the surrounding desolation more felt. Now and then we caught sight of a number of ostriches lifting their long necks to the skies, and walking whither they liked. But they always have a keeper at hand, and it may be that they have no wandering tendencies, no ambition to roam beyond their little world. Moreover there are boundaries set, though invisible from our point of view.

They are somewhat ungainly birds, as you well know, who have seen them in Egypt. But out here, roaming these wild solitudes, they do not look unpicturesque. They seem to fit in with the scenery, just as you may have remarked does the camel, when he is crossing the Sahara or any other great desert. Lions and tigers would no doubt look equally in place in these vast solitudes, and the more gentle and intelligent elephant; but they are never seen here now: they have retired to still more remote and desolate fastnesses, and have become almost a tradition. Where a railway comes, and where man is occasionally found, there will the wild beasts of prey seldom venture.

As far as I am concerned, I don't know that I should have considered a herd of lions an agreeable sight. Like our good friend the Dutch minister at Stellenbosch, I am for peace, and if I must encounter lions and tigers, I prefer them behind the safe bars of the Zoological Gardens. H. looked a little pitying and contemptuous when I made some such remark in our progress. To penetrate into the interior on a lion-hunting expedition, would to him just now be Elysium. So every age brings its appropriate desire and delight. For me the lion-hunting age is over, if it ever existed, which I much doubt. All this is a question of nerve and muscle and powers of endurance. It has nothing to do with mere courage, but is born of skill, and the love of adventure and enterprise; good and wholesome and charming for those who possess all the attributes which go to the making of a great hunter of the far west. I have to be satisfied with seeing these things with others' eyes.

The ostriches being tamer creatures, we viewed with calmer emotions.

Historically they bear some interest, since their plumes have long been held in such high esteem. In days gone by they were almost always the mark of royalty, so costly was the adornment. The shy birds were difficult to capture, and there was the great fear of extinction if carried to excess. Perhaps they first rose in English

estimation when the Black Prince at the Battle of Crecy in 1346, slew the King of Bohemia, and plucking the ostrich feathers from the king's helmet, placed them in his own: since when, as we know, three ostrich feathers have formed the crest of the Princes of Wales.

But for many a long century after this, no one ever attempted to trade very much in ostrich feathers, or to dream of domesticating these huge birds, more shy than the gazelle, wilder than the curlew.

Not until the year 1864 was anything of the sort essayed in South Africa, when some young ostriches were captured by two farmers

TEA PLANTATION.

with a view to taming them for purposes of trade. They were fairly successful, yet the industry would probably have died out but for the discovery of the incubating machine. It was always easy to get the eggs, but not so easy to capture the birds—which, by the way, are said to be not half so stupid as the world supposes. I do not know how this may be, but cannot imagine very much sense in those very small heads. How greatly the trade prospered may be gathered from the fact that the export of feathers in 1865 was valued at about £65,000: whilst in 1882 it was valued at over £1,000,000 sterling. Since then

it has somewhat declined, owing to some disease attacking the young birds.

At the present time there are said to be about 150,000 domesticated ostriches in Cape Colony, in which £8,000,000 of capital are invested.

So here is another great industry added to fruit-growing, and vintage, and the wealth of mines, in all which South Africa is or may be so abundantly blessed. Her buried riches—who can tell them?

A visit to an ostrich farm is certainly one of the things to do in South Africa, as well as one of the most interesting: far more so, to my thinking, than exploring a diamond mine at Kimberley or a gold mine at Johannisberg. The largest farms are in the Eastern Province of Cape Colony, some of them having an extent of 13,000 acres. To an English farmer, who thinks his 400 acres a very respectable estate, this will pass quite beyond the bounds of his imagination: just as we are unable to realise the distance to the nearest fixed star, however exactly the number of miles may stare us in the face in black and white. They live chiefly on a mixture of grass, Karoo, which is a sort of heather, and young and tender bushes. About 1000 birds constitute a large farm.

The whole farm is enclosed by wire fence, five feet high, and this is one of the most expensive items at the outset in setting up an ostrich farm. The fence has to be high and strong, or the birds would easily break through.

Each farm is again subdivided into various camps of different sizes. Near the houses the camps are about 100 acres each, and these belong to the young birds. These young birds are generally in the care of Hottentots, who take them in hand and feed them almost from the time they are hatched. As a rule they are strong and thrive well and grow quickly. They chiefly need warmth and to be kept dry, and if they are out when a shower comes on, you may see 20 or 30 of these small birds running after the Hottentot, just as, at home, a brood of chickens will follow a hen. Their food is grass finely cut up, gravel, broken bones, and a sort of oatmeal.

Other camps are of 25 acres, and each one of these is given up entirely to a royal ostrich king and queen.

Again there are camps of nearly 3000 acres, containing 150 or 200 birds, who thus have large roaming privileges. But all are closely tended by Hottentots or Kaffirs. There are outside dangers which have to be guarded against. As in England the wily fox runs off with our young turkeys and geese, so the wild carnivorous animals which abound in South Africa will run off with the young ostriches. None is more destructive than the jackal, and one of these animals alone will destroy a whole brood in one night. These depredators are kept at bay by laying down pieces of meat and strychnine round the camps, a method by which numbers are killed, and the game in the neighbourhood of the farms is preserved. The pieces of poisoned

meat do good service: they are keepers who never take to poaching on their own account; they never strike, and give no trouble. Near these farms you may see the graceful antelope bounding about: and if you are a fair shot and on friendly terms with the farm keeper, he will certainly give you a chance of carrying away a fine pair of horns.

In another camp there is a nest, and here we are in some danger. The male bird is not only strong but fierce. His the task to sit on the nest by night, the female taking her turn by day. Before entering this camp a thorn bush is given to you, and if the male bird shows symptoms of attack, this bush must be held to his eyes. Amongst the Karoo bushes you catch sight of the nest and the hen bird, who immediately straightens her neck on the ground and does her best to conceal herself. In this position she looks very much like a monster ant-heap, and she is probably wise enough to know this. Suddenly, with angry cry, the male bird, having caught sight of the intruders, charges swiftly down upon them. As they have been known to kill a man, the attack is serious; but the thorn bush is all-sufficient. He cannot pass it without blinding himself, and though he tries to dodge round, you must be equally clever in giving him no quarter. If you are attacked unawares by an ostrich the best thing is to throw yourself flat on the ground. The higher the point of attack, the more strength have they in their legs, possessing very little as the foot nears the earth.

The moment you reach the nest and take up the egg, you may lay down the thorn bush. The male bird immediately loses all his anger and becomes cowed, uttering a sad cry, which is a distinct pleading for the protection of his egg.

In this he shows both intelligence and feeling, and hard must be the heart that could rob him of his cherished treasure, in which he has the wisdom to know lurks an offspring that in a few weeks may become the pride of his ostrich heart. The eggs weigh about three pounds each, and the nest is nothing but a sandy hollow, too often an insufficient protection against carnivora or heavy rains.

The carrion crows are a great source of danger. They are very clever and cunning. As their bills are not strong enough to break the eggs, they carry up a stone in their claws and drop it down upon the nest. Every nest contains about fifteen eggs—the number of an ordinary brood. The period of incubation is six weeks. Many of the ostrich farms are also dairy farms: and at certain hours, if you visit the kraals, you may see from 70 to 100 cows being milked by the Kaffirs. The cattle eat the coarse grass which is rejected by the more delicate ostrich, and thus nothing is wasted.

But this is a slight digression from our journey towards Grahamstown, though scarcely out of place. Yet it is certain that neither farmhouses, nor ostrich farms with their invisible boundaries, nor groups of birds stalking about and enjoying life in their own way, gave

us a tithe of the delight that we found in all the wonderful and unlimited stretches of country, covered with their wealth of trees and shrubs, creepers and wild flowers.

Often the train moved so slowly that we had to place a restraint upon ourselves not to jump out and pluck handfuls of wild geraniums or fuchsias or wild lilies, or jessamine, or flaming blossoms of the poynsettia species; and catching up the train again, re-enter the carriage with a wealth of wild beauty. It would often have been quite possible, only there was the fear that in the malignant crossness of events already quoted, once out of the train the engine would at once put on express steam and fly off at the rate of at least ten miles an hour.

So the lovely ride, the lovely morning, and the lovely vision which rejoiced our eyes continued for many hours without interruption. It was one grand, ceaseless progress amidst such wealth and beauty and colouring of nature, as I think we had never dreamed of; certainly never seen in so great abundance.

"And this is the journey that we were told would prove so infinitely monotonous and uninteresting," said H. "What can such people be made of?"

"It is difficult to say. Every foot of our way has been full of indescribable charm. We might make the journey every day for a month, only to find, day by day, fresh beauties and delight."

"What a region for a botanising tour," he exclaimed. "But instead of a candle-box, I think we should need a waggon for our hoards. It seems to me that the specimens both of ferns and wild flowers are unlimited."

"I believe they are so. No country is so rich in flora as South Africa, though the absolute reason for this does not seem to be known. But the soil is evidently productive and the climate perfect, and we see the amazing result."

We had passed more stations on our way. Mimosa—so named, perhaps, because the beautiful mimosa thorn flourishes so largely in the neighbourhood, with its gorgeous yellow flowers; a name which brought Scott to our memory, and *Marmion*; those lines in which he exclaims "For not mimosa's tender tree shrinks sooner from the touch." I suppose all we were passing through would be called Bush country; certainly it is wild and desolate enough, but it is very lovely, and one can hardly fancy that even long years of residence in these solitudes would uncivilise one. We seem for ever in communion with the highest and best that is in nature; with earth in all her glory and beauty, as she was fashioned in those days when it was said of her: "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind; . . . and it was so. . . . And God saw that it was good."

After Mimosa, with its lovely suggestions, came Sandflats, also true to its name, and surrounded by an arid, sandy soil, where the

TRAVELLING IN SOUTH AFRICA. TEAM OF BULLOCKS FORDING A STREAM.

bushes just managed to sustain life. And then Bellevue, where again vegetation was rich and rare.

But all these stations were the very picture of desolation. There were no other signs of life and civilisation. They alone seemed to possess the earth and the world. One could only wonder what lay beyond, and where that Beyond lay. Once we saw a man trudging alone through the wilds, followed by a lean, half-starved dog. He looked like a pedlar or packman, or something of the sort, but could scarcely have been so, for where in these wilds would he find customers? The native ladies, if they exist, adorn themselves in blankets —lovely creatures!—and bonnets and silk stuffs and decent drapery to them would be works of supererogation.

And so we reached Alicedale, which is a junction, and here we had to change carriages, and wait half an hour or more. The day was wearing onwards, and we were beginning to feel that the hour for luncheon had long passed, and that it is an indisputable law of nature that man must eat to live. But they scarcely recognise the truth on this line.

Here at Alicedale there certainly was a department dignified by the name of *buffet*, but the delicacies were such that we were fain to fall back upon dry bread—not of the newest description. Once more we felt that South Africa is yet in its infancy; the day will come when these matters will have to be seen to. Sir James Sivewright recognised the want and endeavoured to improve the existing state of things, but his efforts were negatived by a majority against him, and so for the moment the opportunity was lost—and travellers must fast.

There really is a small settlement at Alicedale which may be dignified by the name of village. Also, the surrounding plains were brilliant with wild flowers, which now might be gathered in abundance. One traveller, a lady who had been on board the *Dunottar* and was journeying in a "ladies' compartment," next to our own, went off to the fields and returned bending under the weight of her gorgeous trophies.

"I never saw such flowers," she exclaimed; "have never taken such a journey. The whole thing has passed like a dream or a fairy pantomime. Surely this is the land of fairies, and the whole country is one enormous fairy bower. Do you not think so?"

We quite entered into her enthusiasm, for we also had felt all through that these must be the Elysian Fields. H.'s Elysium might be lion and elephant hunting—here was ours: calmness and beauty *versus* excitement and adventure. He was no doubt right. "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may." Time flies all too quickly; opportunities seldom repeat themselves. When we are young and strong we think life and the world will last for ever; and suddenly one morning we wake up to find that the grasshopper is beginning to be a burden and lion hunting has lost its charm: and we have not made as much of our opportunities as we might have done.

Walking about the platform, waiting for our train to arrive, feasting our eyes upon the surrounding country—a certain compensation for the physical fasting we had to undergo—the Bishop of Grahamstown, who had arrived by train from an opposite direction came up and introduced himself to us, and was exceedingly kind, volunteering to do anything in his power and inviting us to spend part of the next day with him. As we wished to see all we could and our time was limited, it was arranged that we should join him after evening service, and take supper with him. His lordship has been travelling through some part of his enormous diocese, on a confirmation tour: and the fatigue sometimes undergone on these occasions must be enormous. What a different life from anything we find or dream of in our small and civilised England! And yet it seems to me that to live and labour in one of these gigantic countries ought to give one a breadth of mind, a broadness of vision, a depth of sympathy, almost impossible to those who dwell in "smaller circles."

After leaving Alicedale, when more than two-thirds of our journey was over, the character of the scenery changed. We continued in an easterly direction: the other line leading to Colesberg and Bloemfontein—which we hope to see on our way back to Cape Town.

The aspect of the country was now altered. Huge hills rose about us, with long sweeping undulations wild and barren. Hitherto we had rejoiced in plains adorned with every species of wildflower; a prodigal luxuriance of nature in which man had no part; now the wildness was all desolation, and the effect instead of being exhilarating was depressing. Scarce a tree or shrub was to be seen. The hills were covered with a sombre green, a singular and mournful depth of colouring. To the expanse there seemed no end. On one side the line occasionally opened onto precipitous depths. Far down one gazed upon fertile valleys, the homes of immense flocks of sheep and other cattle. Farm-houses were here and there visible, with their white walls and black roofs; picturesque objects, as I have remarked, that almost added to the desolation and solitude.

Towards evening, approaching Grahamstown, we passed into a more civilised and cultivated country. The hills fell back in wavy undulations, hill behind hill, as if here, too, the sea had once held sway and retired, leaving its mark for ever. Distance and expanse were beautiful. Sights and sounds of life also began to multiply themselves and we felt that we were once more entering into inhabited regions.

Finally we approached Grahamstown itself and looked down upon it from our superior height. It was beautifully and romantically situated on the slopes of the Zuurburg Mountains, of which I have mentioned the Pass near Coerney. All round it rose these protecting hills with their gentle undulations. Vegetation seemed almost tropical in its luxuriance. From the centre uprose the beautiful spire of the Cathedral, one of the highest in the Colony, designed by Sir Gilbert

Scott, though I believe he had no concern with the main body of the building.

The train rolled in to the platform, and after our long day through profound solitudes, we found ourselves in the midst of quite a bewildering crowd. Here we bade a temporary farewell to the Bishop, who was anxious to return home to a delicate and invalid wife, and "each went his separate way."

We found the hotel omnibus waiting for us, and on the platform an hotel porter trying to distinguish us amidst the crowd. They have an instinct, these men, which seldom fails them, and so of course we were immediately discovered and appropriated. For we were expected, having telegraphed our arrival. We had thought it an unnecessary precaution, but the hotel proved fairly full. The best rooms, however, which our host apologised for not giving us, were in possession of visitors that were more trouble than profit to him, and certainly more free than welcome. These were nothing less than sundry rats behind the wainscotting, who had waxed so bold that war to the death had now to be waged against them. "Of course, sir," said the landlord, "there are the rooms, at your service, but I can hardly advise your occupying them. They come out and play high jinks at night." The expression was our host's, and we have no doubt it was very graphic and accurate; and we so far endorsed his opinion as to prefer the comparative discomfort of two small rooms downstairs—the only alternative at his disposal.

So here we were settled until Monday morning, and it seemed to us as a long spell of rest and repose.

We found the hotel quite civilised, and the landlord anxious to do his utmost: no doubt influenced by a note from Sir James Sivewright, and also a message from the Bishop, who had been good enough to tell us to make use of his name. As the landlord was a thorough churchman, we could not have brought a better passport to his favour. We found table d'hôte an institution here, and much better than one could have expected: and if all the other rooms were small, the dining-room was large and airy, and the tables were adorned with snow-white linen.

After dinner, when darkness was falling, we went out to see what might be visible of the town. In a quiet way it seemed very flourishing. It is the seat of two Bishoprics, the Anglican and the Roman Catholic. The latter has also a college, and, I almost think, a monastery or convent. But the recognised religion is of course the Protestant, and the Cathedral in High Street is a conspicuous building. Just now it is undergoing alterations, and we did not see it to advantage.

Grahamstown was once a military station, but this has been removed, to the regret of the inhabitants; for in those days it was one of the gayest and pleasantest places in the whole Colony, and boasted its best society, Cape Town excepted. It still possesses its law courts,

and so though the military element is removed, the legal still remains. But there is a possibility that the courts will also be transferred elsewhere, and then Grahamstown will feel as if it had received its social death-blow.

In days gone by the military element was needed for use as well as ornament. The town was founded in 1812: and in 1819 it became a military station. In those days the savage natives gave trouble, and the district for many years was in constant warfare. The whole neighbourhood, hills and valleys, can tell terrible stories of inroad and bloodshed. In 1819 the settlement was attacked by a force of natives 10,000 strong, but they were driven back with great loss by a garrison of only 320 men. Again they charged down in 1834, when

GRAHAMSTOWN.

many of the settlers were murdered and much property was destroyed. In 1846, there was fighting again in the defiles of the Amatola Mountains: and again three years later many of the settlers—farmers and their families—were massacred. Since 1853, Grahamstown has been in peace, and all fears of invasion are supposed to be at an end.

In the large and admirable Town Hall, we found a very fine and well-organised Library, and from the Librarian received great courtesy. He placed everything at our disposal, but as it was now Saturday night, and the Library is closed on Sunday, and we were to leave at 6.30 on Monday morning, we were unable to do more than glance at the most interesting collection of volumes. The hall also contains an excellent museum, a ball and concert room, and a large

Council Chamber. So the people of Grahamstown are not only enterprising, but evidently have the good taste to love music and dancing. The exterior is distinguished by a square clock-tower, built on arches over the front pavement, commemorating the bravery of the settlers in 1820 when invaded by the natives.

The next morning, Sunday, rose bright and clear; not a cloud in the sky. Grahamstown looked its very best.

Such a "Sabbath-stillness," such an observance of the day, we scarcely ever found, even in the severest of Scotch Presbyterian towns. There was scarcely a person visible in the streets; not a vehicle of any sort or description; the very cats and dogs seemed to know that it was not a day for frivolous frolics and barks and bites, for they kept well within doors, or gravely and sedately occupied the doorsteps.

Not a sound disturbed the prevailing quiet. No shop or store of any sort or description was open—this indeed would evidently have led to a civil rebellion perhaps as dangerous and sanguinary as the wars with the natives in days gone by. The very inns of the place had respectably closed their front doors, and there was no listless lounging about, as in so many of our English towns, where Sunday evening is now too often only another name for a mild sort of Pandemonium.

Here in Grahamstown the quiet was remarkable. Had it been a colony of Quakers or Scotch Covenanters it could not have been more rigidly observed. Our landlord told us it is always so; and as a rule, if you want a cart on the Sunday—their name for the fashionable conveyance of the country—you cannot have it.

We went out after breakfast, and found Grahamstown, in the daylight and Sabbath stillness, exceedingly pleasant. Its situation singularly beautiful; its streets all wide thoroughfares, many of them lined with trees: not the magnificent avenues we found in Stellenbosch, but all the same charming and refreshing to the eye. They cast long shadows upon the roads and so made very pleasant pictures. There is a certain sameness in all these South African towns, but few possess the charm of situation that belongs to this capital of the Eastern Provinces.

It is also considered one of the healthiest places in South Africa, and many invalids come here for restoration to health. For my own part, I should prefer the higher plateaus, where at 6000 feet above the level of the sea, you find an air exhilarating as champagne, and where people ought to become centenarians and then die young. Grahamstown, surrounded by its hills, lovely though they are, must be more or less relaxing; but in cases of consumption it is said to perform wonders: completely curing those who in an adverse climate might have only a few months to live. It has the lowest mean temperature in summer of all towns in the Eastern Provinces; and then occurs the largest rainfall, so that its climate is especially dry. It is 1800 feet above the level of the sea.

ZULUS SEEN ON OUR WAY TO EAST LONDON.

We attended the cathedral in the morning, but as I have said, it is undergoing repair, and the service had to be held under drawbacks. They are building a new chancel, which no doubt will be a great improvement, though from the outside it looked to us almost out of proportion with the rest of the building.

Of the suburbs of the town, which are said to be singularly lovely, we could see nothing. We had not the courage to break the rule of the place and ask for a conveyance, and possibly if we had asked it might have been in vain. In these hurried journeys, when absolutely tied to time, one must be content to see a little and miss much. But in the afternoon we visited the Botanical Gardens, said to be the finest in South Africa. They lie on undulating ground, which adds to their picturesque appearance. The gardener in his Sunday best, happened to be watering his hot-houses, and seeing our interest, he carefully took us round the gardens. He was a Scotchman and gave us a history of his previous labours; and his genuine love and enthusiasm for his work were refreshing to witness. None seemed to afford him the delight of these gardens, which he had helped to bring to such perfection. Many of the plants were rare and curious, many unknown to us; and many a tropical plant and tree grew in the open air.

We went back to the hotel, and were just in time to receive a visit from the Dean, and we sat together for an hour in the verandah overlooking the road, with the distant hills to right and left of us. He told us many things about the place, the state of the church, and South Africa in general, which I have no time to record here, and which perhaps would scarcely interest you.

So the day passed quietly, as the Day of Rest should pass: and in the evening when the shadows were lengthening, and the hills were putting on a deeper tone, and the brilliant sunshine had turned to gold and crimson, the bells rang out for service, and we found ourselves in the same seats in the Cathedral that we had occupied not many hours before.

After service we joined the Bishop, and spent a delightful evening with him. Bishopsbourne—as the residence is called if I am not mistaken—is a charming house with large and lofty rooms which must form an earthly paradise in summer: and as far as we could see, the grounds surrounding it were unusually attractive. There was a silvery moon in the sky, and we went out before supper and wondered at the charm of the scene. To some ladies visiting the Bishop of course its romance especially appealed. All this landscape touched with the pale light was as a dream. But for me there will never again be such moonlight as on that memorable night when together we visited the Tombs of the Caliphs outside that city of Mosques and Minarets, Cairo the Beautiful. All other nights and all other comparisons pale before it. Even the moonlit Pyramids, with all their greatness and all their antiquity; even the Sphinx with all its

mystery; did not equal that wonderful night: partly perhaps because it had in it the charm of the unexpected; somewhat it may be, because of the mesmeric charm of your companionship.

Nevertheless it was very lovely, that night at Bishopsbourne; and when we had said good-bye, and walked through the silent roads to our hotel, we felt that the evening had thrown its halo over a quiet but notable day. All was pleasant to look back upon and to remember. Our minds become a series of mental photographs as the years go on: and it is well that what is best and happiest dwells longest in the memory. Just as, of those near and dear to us who have passed away, we remember only the good. Evidently, therefore, good is the strongest of all powers and the most lasting.

The next morning we had to rise early. We were to go to King Williamstown by cart—post cart, carrier's cart, whatever you like to call it, so that your name shall express something very uncomfortable, conducted by an exceedingly surly and uncivil driver. At 6.30 it was to start, and our landlord informed us that like time and tide, it would wait for no man. Consequently by 6.30 we had risen, breakfasted, paid our modest reckoning, and were ready. The punctual cart was of course behind time, and it was seven o'clock before we found ourselves passing out of Grahamstown.

Of our journey I must tell you in my next letter. We are now at East London, surely the most hope-forgotten place under the sun. A hurricane is blowing such as the inhabitants scarcely remember. Deluges of rain are coming down accompanied by squalls that are simply appalling. A furious sea is raging, waves are running mountains high. Outside lies the *Dunottar Castle:* but nothing can come to us from her, and nothing from us can reach her. All communication is impossible: and oh, horror of horrors, it is said that she may probably go off to Durban and leave us to expire of despair. The inn is conducted on the principles of a public-house; it is crowded with a noisy set of men, who make life a nightmare to us; our own wretched rooms are our only refuge; twenty times in an hour we go out to consult the skies, only to find them growing darker and more lowering, the rain more deluging, the hurricane more furious. Not far off we hear the roaring and beating of the waves upon the shore; a hundred yards away the *Dunottar* rides upon the storm, strong, determined, invincible: and this hundred yards of boiling foam is just what lies between us and happiness.

What will be the result?

THE UNBIDDEN GUEST.

A TRUE STORY.

[The following is fact, and given with but such slight and unimportant modifications as circumstances have required.]

NEVER, within the memory of the "oldest inhabitant," had the town been thrown into a state of excitement by the announcement of royal entertainment equal to that awakened by the issuing of cards for the historical ball given in Turin in 18— by the Duke and Duchess of Aosta.

It fairly set the entire population chattering. The invited rejoiced —the would-be-invited intrigued for a card—the tongues of the remainder teemed with tales of impossible preparations and unheard-of splendour. The happy possessors of the royal mandate might have been seen hurrying from jeweller to dressmaker, bootmaker to tailor, antiquary to museum ; or else discovered deep in research amid time-honoured folios and curios, overhauling and overturning all that came in their way or bore reference to the secretly chosen costume. Happy indeed, was he or she who had been fortunate enough to unearth from antique cabinet and chest an old-fashioned jewel or piece of brocade which had once been the property of some long-departed ancestor or great-grandmother, and which had been, by disrespectful moderns, consigned to darkness and the lingering odour of perfumes of the past.

A month had been allowed for preparation. But then the preparation was expected to be perfect. The Duchess was not the woman to allow any anachronism to escape her, nor to spare the unlucky perpetrator her opinion of the same.

Perhaps in all Europe there is not a pleasanter court than that of Italy. There is sufficient etiquette to maintain prestige, but no more. Guests are received, not only with kingly courtesy, but also with kindly cordiality. Sociability is never suffered to freeze to death under the ice of ceremony.

There is little of the starch and stateliness of Berlin ; the heraldic hierarchy of Vienna ; the alternative frost and thaw of London ; nor are guests herded according to their rank, in three separate saloons as in Copenhagen ; nor is there vestige of the *noli me tangere* system of the sundry yet-existing German courtlets.

At the Italian Court, on the contrary, you are sure of a smile and a word of welcome, and are as free to enjoy yourself as if there were no such things on earth as a grand master of the ceremonies and the Almanach de Gotha. They are, doubtless, both useful in their way —but, like garlic, need to be employed sparingly in order to be palatable.

As the all-important day drew nigh individual anxiety and public curiosity increased. Years of experience had taught that the "to-morrow" of Bellezza the jeweller, and of Madame L'Abbé the dress-maker, was unpleasantly like that of the Spaniards, and apt never to arrive. So that many were the broughams to be seen standing before the doors of the respective establishments, and many the anxious countesses and marchionesses awaiting within the said vehicles their turn of admission. For Madame L'Abbé's rooms were limited in number; and, as secrecy was naturally to be preserved, she could only receive a very few applicants at a time.

In one of the snug, remodernised rooms of the venerable Castle of Rocca d'Oro sat the young mistress of countless acres and almost untold wealth. A bright fire was blazing in the huge chimney, nobly fed with logs, whose size and number would have made a dweller in cities stare.

The firelight flung cheery, changeful gleams upon all within the apartment—upon the gilt mouldings of the ceiling, the mellow pictures, the richly-tinted stuffs, and many-hued porcelains—playing here and there in fitful caprice; now sinking low as if to gather fresh strength for a sudden joyous outburst such as put to shame the tall wax lights upon the tea-table and make them grow yellow with envy.

The big brass breguet upon the quaintly carved chimney-piece chimed out nine, and, before the last vibration had died upon the perfumed tepid atmosphere, the Marquis entered the room.

"How is he?" asked he as he took a seat opposite his wife.

"Much better, God be thanked. The doctor says that all danger is over."

The Marquis gave a deep sigh of relief. And well he might. For it was a question of his only child, a boy of eight, who, having managed to tumble into a pond, had incurred, not the danger of drowning, for the water was shallow, but an attack of fever which threatened to take a bad turn.

"Well, if that's the case, we can take our tea in comfort, Cordelia. There, don't stir, I'll wheel the table round to you."

He did so, and then resumed his seat; the soft light of the tapers falling full upon his handsome features.

"The doctor says Guido will be up in three days, and able to go out before the week is over," said the Marchioness handing her husband his cup.

"Better and better. Poor boy! He has had an ugly bout of it!"

"Yes, indeed. I don't know if, even with his strong constitution, he would have got through it if it had not been for dear old Brigitta. She never left him night or day."

"I know it. She is the model of a servant of days gone by, and I don't wonder our aunt thought so much of her."

He lifted his eyes to the portrait over the chimney-piece as he spoke.

A large oval painting of an old lady in quaintly fashioned dress and a sort of black lace drapery above her snowy hair. An excellent likeness, as anyone could have told, with dark earnest eyes, a lovely complexion and well-cut features, upon which haughtiness and kindness were strangely blent.

"Even the old lady seems to smile down upon us," said the Marquis; "just look, Cordelia."

"You are right, Guido: it is almost like a living face."

The dancing firelight of course did it all, but it really did seem as if the features had become suddenly endowed with life.

"You will laugh at me, I know, but I assure you that at times I feel almost afraid of that picture."

"My dear Cordelia! Afraid of our poor old aunt! She to whom we owe everything!"

"Yes, I know that, but still——"

"Who, till her very last moment, showed herself full of loving forethought for us. And I am sure death has in no wise changed her. Who knows that she is not even now listening to what we are saying. Wrapped up as she was in the welfare of her house and lineage while on earth, do you think that she can have ceased to care for us now that she is no more among us? *I* don't."

"Oh, Guido, you make me feel quite creepy. I only hope that, if she ever should haunt the place, I may never see her! But I want to talk to you. The Duchess's ball. It takes place in less than three weeks, and—— You think we can go to it?"

"Of course we can. The boy, you say, is doing well, and will be out in a few days. We will take him with us to Turin—the change will do him good."

"And our dresses?"

"I shall go in the armour of our ancestor, Arduino della Rocca, and, if you will follow my suggestion, you will go as our good aunt over the chimney-piece there. With your hair powdered, and in such a dress, you will be her very picture."

"Oh Guido! Do you think she would like it? Just think! she may, as you said, be listening to us."

A sudden blaze of firelight sprang up and flung dancing gleams and shadows into every corner of the room.

"Look," continued Guido pointing to the portrait; "look and convince yourself."

Cordelia obeyed. And it really seemed as if the painting were nodding a willing consent.

"If Aunt Orsola is not smiling down upon us, I'm no sinner!"

The flame fell as suddenly as it had burst forth, and the portrait resumed its immobility in the steady glow of the wax lights.

"Then I will go as Aunt Orsola. There are loads of her old dresses up in the presses of her former rooms. I can easily have one of them lengthened. There are brocades among them that must be

priceless. One especially—red carnations on a gold ground—such a stuff!"

"Well, look it all out to-morrow. I am glad now I did not get the family diamonds reset. They will do famously, with their old-fashioned silver mountings. You shall show them all what a figure an Ivrea Châtelaine can cut at court if she pleases."

The ball had been fixed for Tuesday, and the preceding Saturday the Marquis, Marchioness, and Guido had arrived in Turin and taken possession of their rooms at the Hôtel d'Angleterra. They had always put up there, and thanks to their position, wealth and courteous bearing, had always been treated with marked respect and favour by the proprietor and his dependents. The apartment consisted of a drawing-room, bedroom and dressing-room on the first-floor, with windows fronting the royal palace on the opposite side of the square. This time another room, a few doors off, had been added for little Guido and his faithful old Brigitta.

As at Court balls the license of dropping in at all sorts of hours is not allowed, there was a considerable crush upon the grand staircase when the della Roccas entered the palace.

Once within the apartments, all discomfort was at an end. There the guests could circulate where and how they pleased. Little groups gathered here and there, chatting, laughing, criticising and observing —now breaking asunder to scatter for a moment; then re-forming the next minute—ever changing, and, kaleidoscope-like, ever producing fresh combinations of colour such as at once to attract, bewilder and please.

The whole scene represented a living page of Italian history, and in its complex brilliancy gave but small token of the patient research that had been needful to its composition.

The Marquis della Rocca d'Oro in the gold-embossed armour of his warlike ancestor, Sir Arduino, and the Marchioness in her magnificent red and gold brocade and family diamonds formed no insignificant feature of the glittering assembly.

Her husband had been right; Aunt Orsola's costume became her wonderfully, and her likeness to the oval portrait at the castle was extraordinary.

At eleven o'clock the folding-doors at the end of the suite were thrown open, and the Duke and Duchess of Aosta entered; he in the armour of the "Green Count," his ancestor, and one of the most valiant of the valiant Sabandan dynasty, his consort on his arm. Both well became the characters they had chosen—the Duke, a proud warrior in green harness; the Duchess, a right stately dame with regal mien, and looking more imposing than ever with her high coronet which, however correct, was hardly becoming.

Slowly the royal hosts made the tour of the rooms, welcoming their guests with cordiality, and enjoying to the full the scene which, so to

say, they had created. Then the quadrille of honour was formed, walked through, and the ball had fairly begun.

Needless, and as impossible as needless, to describe the hours that followed. Music, light, and perfume, beauty and brightness, the shimmer of stuffs and the sheen of jewels, the hum of voices and the occasional ripple of laughter, an ever-swaying, undulating crowd made up of all that rank, wealth and talent could furnish, the splendour of the past without its coarseness, the refinement of the present minus its monotony. Looking from the pillared ball-room down the vista of apartments right and left, the scene was such as must have stamped itself upon the memory of even the most unheeding.

At last the doors of the armoury were thrown open, and, headed by the Duke and Duchess, the company, two and two, filed in to supper.

Here, too, as far as was possible, the mediæval character had been preserved.

Midway down the long table rose a trophy of game—the centre an entire buck—and the board must literally have groaned under the weight of wild boar, enormous pasties, peacocks with spreading tails, fruit and flowers, massive plate and glittering glass, to say nothing of the castles in caramel, the fortresses in marzapane, and the hundred other cunningly devised dishes with which they were interspersed.

And added to all was the magnificence of the gallery in which the banquet was spread. The waving banners, the glittering arms, the suits of armour, the horses looking strangely real with their accoutrements; the thousand treasures of history and triumphs of art, in short, that render the collection superior to all that Europe can boast of, not excluding even the celebrated one of Madrid—all these need the pen of a Scott or the palette of a Kaulbach to do them justice.

So well had everything been organised that there was neither confusion nor delay, and every guest found him or herself marched to an appointed place by the pages stationed there for the purpose. Guido and his supper-partner were marshalled to seats not very far from the middle of the table where the Duke and Duchess presided. Countless wax-lights illuminated the scene, causing jewels to sparkle, armour to glitter, silk and velvet to glisten, glass and silver to flash. The tepid air was heavy with the aroma of rich wines. The fragrance of flushing fruit, the perfume of nodding flowers. The whole steeped in that warm, tremulous glow that nought but tapers can shed. The continued hum of voices formed a pleasant accompaniment to the ring of glass and the click of knife and fork, and the scene in its ensemble was such as poet might dream of and painter try to embody.

Guido della Rocca was enjoying himself thoroughly. His wife's appearance had been a decided triumph, and this had greatly gratified him; the Duke and Duchess had been especially friendly to both the Marchioness and himself; and the present scene accorded well with

a sentiment that had ever lurked in the breasts of all the della Rocca race, viz., the love of anything that smacked of chivalry, and a decided leaning towards everything that savoured of magnificence and pomp. His partner of the moment, too, had proved an amusing one. She was one of those women who, living *in* the world and *for* the world, make as pleasant companions for an hour, as they prove themselves troublesome mates for a lifetime. His left-hand neighbour, on the contrary, was a blue-stocking who, during the whole supper-time, had never ceased arguing with her cavalier and appealing to Guido to support her opinion of the motto of the House of Savoy being really "Vert," after the "Green Knight," and not "Fert," as erroneously supposed and adopted.

The meal, to which ample justice had been done, was drawing to a close; the grand attack had ended, and only the lighter skirmishing with bon-bons and similar trifles remained.

"How terribly warm it is getting!" said Guido's partner setting down her glass. "I wish they would open some of the windows!"

Mechanically Guido glanced across the table to the long row of windows opposite, and as he did so, a strange chill ran through his frame. It was as if an icy current had suddenly streamed over him, stirring his very hair, and curdling the warm blood in his veins.

"Do you find it so warm?" he began. "I——"

"There! the Duchess has risen, thank goodness. What an awful noise those trumpets are making! But, for Heaven's sake, what is the matter? Are you ill?"

For Guido, like all the rest, had risen; only unlike them, and instead of occupying himself in preparation for the impending march of exit, there he stood, with pale cheeks and staring eyes, gazing fixedly over at the window opposite.

"Are you ill?" she repeated.

"No—not ill—only a sudden spasm—it will be over directly—please take no notice of it."

Nobody else had remarked his agitation, for all were more or less occupied in shaking out skirts, smoothing down doublets and the like, previous to following the royal hosts out of the gallery in the same order in which they had entered.

A slight delay caused by the entangling of the Duchess's train in the "Green Count's" spur, luckily occurred, and afforded time for Guido to drink off the glass of wine that his companion pressed upon him. Then, immediately in front of them, another little impediment took place owing to a search having to be made for a middle-aged marchioness's shoe which she had slipped off at the beginning of supper to ease the pinching—penalty of trying to wear at fifty the size she had so lightly sported at fifteen—and which shoe had unwittingly been pushed by neighbours' feet to some distance down the table, beneath which it was ultimately discovered and restored to its embarrassed owner.

So these trifling halts gave Guido time to recover himself; but, his gaze continuing to rivet itself upon the window, his companion, half in earnest, half in jest, could not refrain from saying—"Why, Marquis, you look as if you had seen a ghost!"

His reply to the observation, for reply it was, proved a curious one: letting the lady's arm drop, he broke away from her and, making his way against the current now streaming out of the gallery, got round to the other side of the table, and only halted on reaching the window that had so strangely attracted his attention. But nothing was there—the recess, with its grey horse on the one side and its black on the other, was quite empty. "Strange!" he muttered to himself as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Then he looked down the long gallery towards the folding-doors through which the last of the guests were sweeping, and with a "Ha, there she is again!" hastily strode down the apartment. Had he really seen a ghost? Was it a trick? Was it hallucination? Guido asked himself the questions but could find no answer.

Whatever it might be, there she was again, beckoning to him from just within the great open folding-doors, apparently unnoticed by the lackeys who were now passing; yet most clearly visible to himself—his aunt Orsola, as he had seen her a hundred times in life, her earnest eyes fixed upon him, and beckoning him to approach. But also on reaching the doorway no aunt was there—none but guests gathered in little groups, some sitting, others standing, a few wandering idly about.

A chance move gave him a glimpse of the further doorway, and there, just within the next saloon stood the figure again, her eyes upon his, her hand signing to him to follow.

And so he did—through saloon after saloon, threading his way as best he could, and heedless of greeting or remark—alive only to the feeling of terrible anxiety that had now taken possession of him.

On till he found himself in the "Guards' Saloon." There, at the door opening upon the grand staircase, stood the figure, this time with a frown upon its brow and impatience in the motion of its hand.

Out upon the landing—down the broad steps—across the vestibule—out into the court. There before him, under the full blaze of the gas, stood the figure in the bronze gateway, pointing eagerly across the piazza to the hotel opposite.

This time, however, it waited till he had approached within a few feet, and then, with a wild wave of the hand towards the Albergo, suddenly vanished.

What had happened—what was happening there, within those walls? To cross the piazza, enter the hotel, and mount the broad stairs two at a time was the work of but a few seconds. There he found himself face to face with a sleepy waiter in a huge cloak who, startled from his doze upon the broad divan upon which he had been "keeping guard," now stood staring at him with eyes stretched to their widest extent, as

if to impress conviction, not only of being really awake, but also of never having been asleep at all.

Guido snatched up a candlestick, lighted the taper at the gas and, without entering his own apartment, strode across to the door of the room occupied by Brigitta and his son.

No reply to his knock. He repeated it; but with a like result. Then, putting his hand to the lock, to his surprise the door yielded to his touch. He entered.

With a loud cry he sprang over the form of old Brigitta just within, crossed the room at a bound, and tore aside the hangings of the bed. Just in time, too; for there, upon a side table, and in fearful proximity to the curtains, stood a lighted candle. A minute or two later the bed would have been in a blaze.

Fortunately the hangings were of mixed silk and wool—yet even as such, they had begun to smoulder in one spot which the long yellow flame of the candle seemed straining upwards to reach and lick. To crush out the danger and remove the light was but short work. Then he rang the bell for assistance.

Brigitta was raised, carefully carried to a sofa, and a doctor sent for. She had had a sort of fit—not a dangerous one in itself, though its consequences might have been terrible—and having felt unwell, had risen to reach the door, which she had only just been able to unlock before falling.

By the time the Marchioness got back, things had been pretty well restored to order.

Brigitta had been blistered and bled, and little Guido, wide awake and rejoicing, was sitting up in bed, gleefully examining every part of the armour in which "papa" was yet encased.

Brave as he was, he could not repress a shiver when his wife entered the room, so exact a counterpart—save in the jewels—of the form he had so lately seen, and which had rendered him such signal service. "Guido," whispered the Marchioness as she sat down beside her husband, "even after death dear Aunt Orsola has shown herself the best friend we ever had."

"Yes, indeed, darling! But for her——"

His voice grew husky, and he bent and passionately kissed his son. A more eloquent conclusion than any words could have been.

"Say 'God bless Aunt Orsola,'" whispered the Marchioness to her boy.

"God bless Aunt Orsola," repeated he in his clear, childish treble. As sincere an "Amen" as ever passed human lips fell from the grateful parents as they both bent over the child on whose behalf so mysterious an intervention had been so mercifully vouchsafed.

A. B.

IN THE VALE OF THE WHITE HORSE.

By Rosa Mackenzie Kettle, Author of "Smugglers and Foresters," etc.

ABOVE the tops of the trees bordering the yew-tree walk in the Rectory garden, as I paced up and down, in my girlhood, somewhat disconsolately in the sombre shadow, I could see the stone battlements and turrets of an old Manor House.

I had been spending the summer with a married sister, several years older than myself. She and her excellent husband were devoted to parish work and each other. I must confess that I often felt dull and lonely. The Berkshire lanes as autumn approached were as muddy and intricate as when Wayland Smith and the hapless Countess traversed the district. I had no companion to tempt me—no inducement to wander far—I may as well own at once that I was not a strong, active-minded woman.

In my idle moods I often wove stories about the neighbouring mansion, which now stood empty, but in other days was often full of gay company. Its last owner had been a mighty hunter, with whom, as was then customary, the clergyman was on intimate convivial terms; hunting, shooting, and afterwards dining and supping together.

Now in both cases times and men were changed. My grave brother in-law did not indulge in field-sports, or care to drain the wine-cup; and the present lord of the manor was a young man, a great traveller, who spent his time in foreign countries or in London, and seldom visited this rural district.

It was not to the days of the fox-hunting squire and parson that my thoughts turned, as I walked beneath the yew trees, or sat in an old-fashioned arbour at the end of the long walk; but to tales I had heard of an ancestor who kept open house when at home, and distinguished himself in love and war, in camps and courts, when abroad.

An illustrious lady figured in these country-side traditions. Her portrait, it was said, hung side by side with that of the gallant soldier and accomplished cavalier, who, when days of exile followed the fulfilment of her ambitious dreams, had often been her host at the old house in the Vale. There was a mystery about the old place, and though I had been staying for months, close by it at the Rectory, I had never been admitted within its walls. Once only had my sister and I been allowed to pass, through those usually fast-closed gates, into the secluded grounds of the ancient mansion; and even then we were closely pursued and vigilantly watched. Pheasants rose on whirring

wings as we walked under trees whose boughs swept the ground ; hares and rabbits scudded along, scared at the unwonted sound of footsteps, though, involuntarily, we trod softly on that charmed ground.

Squirrels came down from the pine-tops to gaze at us, and chatter to us. I think they would have liked to prolong the interview and conversation, but we were hurried on remorselessly, in order not to disturb the game. We dared not linger.

"Is no one allowed to see the inside of the old house?" I asked in a whisper, as we turned back reluctantly, at the bidding of our taciturn, somewhat surly conductor. "Are there no family pictures, no curious relics shut up in those old rooms? One would think that in its owner's absence we might be permitted to enter."

"No, the house is always shut up," replied the Rector, speaking, perhaps unconsciously, in the same low awe-struck tone. "In my grandfather's life-time, my predecessor in the parish, I have often gone inside the doors. Hospitality was then the order of the day. But sport and politics were the topics of conversation. One might as well have been at a London club or at a race or coursing meeting, instead of in a house full of interesting memories."

"There are legends and traditions, I know, about the old place." I said eagerly, "Is it haunted?"

"Possibly," said my grave brother-in-law with a smile. "I never stayed till the witching midnight hour. Perhaps the polished courtier, the gallant cavalier, may go his rounds in the hushed night. Or a certain noble lady, who was often his honoured guest, may hold revels in his ancient halls. I cannot tell. I have never stayed late enough to meet them. As you know, I am not a sportsman or card-player, and from what I remember of the style of conversation in former days, the guests at the Manor House were not men troubled about spiritual manifestations. Ladies were not often invited ; but I daresay your sister has heard more than I can remember about those festive gatherings in the olden time ; I always came away early. The present owner is a different style of man, cultured and intellectual, but we see very little of him in the Vale."

"Does he not care to visit the Manor House?" I asked. "It always grieves me to see a fine old place deserted and under-valued."

"Only for a few weeks later in the year, during the shooting season," replied my brother-in-law. "There is no establishment kept up. That young man's mother, the housekeeper, has charge of the place. You will hear noise enough when there is a party at the great house, and shooting in the covers. My wife went out for the day rather than hear the guns last year. We had made friends with an old cock-pheasant who came to feed on our lawn, and Emmeline was greatly distressed when she heard the firing close by, and made me take her to the village. But when we returned home, the servants told us that, at the first gun-shot, the fine old fellow went to roost on his tree-top,

and slept through the disturbance. There he is, I declare, sitting on the gate-post! I do not believe that he will move an inch."

The prediction was verified. The stately bird sat calmly, while the Rector quietly opened the gate on our return home, without disturbing his serenity, or even ruffling his plumes.

A few evenings afterwards we were vexed by the disappearance of my sister's favourite cat, whose constant practice it was, when the dinner-bell rang, to tap at the casement window, and take her place at the table opposite to me where a plate was always laid for her. I never could help smiling when the footman wheeled round one of the morocco-covered dining-room chairs for my opposite neighbour; but now I was sorry to miss her. She always conducted herself quite in a ladylike manner, and expected a clean plate when ours were changed.

"If you please, madam, one of the keepers is much grieved, but your cat has been poaching, and is badly hurt by being caught in a snare," was the painful intelligence that greeted us when we rose from table.

My sister opened a window, outside of which a young man was standing, holding a furry bundle, much bespattered with mud, very tenderly in his arms. It was the same under-keeper who had conducted us through the grounds of the Manor House with, as I thought, churlish rapidity.

He now looked more benign, and helped us to place poor wounded pussy in a fur-lined basket, her own especial property, which stood on the wide window-seat.

While we were thus engaged a low grumbling sound startled us, and, looking up, we saw the real Simon Pure, our own domestic treasure, glaring at the interloper installed in her sanctuary, the muddy condition of the injured stranger having prevented our recognising the mistake.

A hearty laugh followed, a hamper lined with straw was fetched from the office and the invalid removed in it to the stables, where it was carefully tended.

Muff sniffed disdainfully at her desecrated couch. It required much coaxing and reasoning to induce her to take an amiable view of the matter, and resign herself to peaceful slumber in her warm, comfortable resting-place.

I had been spending a long, sultry, slumberous day quite alone at the close of August; the Rector and my sister were attending a parish meeting; the book I had been trying to read had fallen from my hand on the bench under the yew trees; the dull old Rectory was even quieter than usual.

Suddenly a man's footstep on the gravel startled me. First impressions are often erroneous; I had noticed the kind manner in which

the young underkeeper handled the poor bruised animal. Now he stood, cap in hand, respectfully, smilingly, waiting to accost me.

"If you would like to see the inside of the Manor House, madam," he said, "I have the keys, and I shall be happy to show you over it. It is your last chance," he added; "the master and some friends will arrive to-morrow; my mother is gone to F—— to engage servants, and provide for a large party of guests, so I am left in charge for a while."

I seemed still rather hazy, and my conductor was as usual in a hurry, having, he said, many duties to attend to. It did not occur to me to leave any message: I followed my guide, who had relapsed into silence, through the dusky woodlands like one in a dream.

It was late in the afternoon of a cloudy day, and the Manor House looked dark and gloomy; I wished that I could have seen it with the sun shining in through the deep mullioned windows, and glinting on the picture-frames. Room after room, often in the old-fashioned style communicating with each other, galleries and corridors, were passed through in the dim light, so quickly that I retain only faint impressions of that first hasty survey: I had scarcely time to notice their contents. At last a pause was made in a large, very antique-looking library. Bookshelves were let into the walls, framed in oak black with age, the pictures were bordered with the same sombre material, and looked as if they could never reflect a ray of sunshine. An ancient oval mirror above the black marble mantelpiece gave back elongated images like a spoon; my feet sank deep in a piled carpet, and a dark velvet couch seemed to extend its arms to welcome a tired person.

"May I sit down," I said, timidly; "I am very weary."

"By all means," said my conductor promptly; "I was about to ask if you would object to my leaving you for a short time. I have several duties to perform, and you will like to look about you; I will return and take you home before nightfall."

He was gone before I could reply; the unwonted sensation of fatigue and drowsiness which crept over me made me rejoice in the proffered rest. I felt too tired to examine the many curious details of the old book-room, or to notice that the key was turned in the lock after my self-constituted guardian had closed the door. I do not know how long I remained in that state of semi-consciousness. The first thing that roused me was the sound of shots at no great distance. I got up and went to the window; but the gloom of evening had fallen on the park, the outlines of great clumps of trees and shrubs, of massive single oaks and beeches, and tall pine trunks, with flat dark tops, were dimly visible in the twilight. I waited, patiently at first, then rather anxiously, for my guide, but no one came.

I began to reflect that my sister would be uneasy about me, if she returned from the village and found me absent, and I resolved to find my way home alone. But when I went to the door it was fast locked. I was a prisoner.

I did not feel much alarmed on my own account, but I was sorry

that I had left no message. No one knew of my departure. Certainly no one was likely to suspect that I was passing the evening in the usually prohibited precincts of the Manor House.

As well as the fading light permitted I examined the dim old room. Family portraits hung at intervals in panels between the rows of books. One of these caught the last gleam of daylight—a knightly figure in Cavalier costume with long, dark, love-locks, and a hat with drooping feathers. His slender hand rested on the mane of a spirited charger, a tiny spaniel of King Charles's breed was sportively jumping up at his knees.

Next to this picture, receding into darkness, was the portrait of a lady with a diamond coronet on her haughty brow. She had a little dog, of the same royal breed as the Cavalier's pet, in her arms, the rich lace of her sleeves falling over his curly hair.

There was not a sound to be heard. No one seemed stirring. I knocked as loudly as I could on the door, and, at last, ventured to pull a bell-rope by the fire-place, but no one answered to the appeal. It grew darker and darker. Night gradually closed in upon me. The sensation of weariness returned. I threw my hat and scarf on a table, sank down upon the velvet couch, and after some time fell asleep.

I could scarcely believe that my eyes served me truly when, on opening them in broad daylight, I saw the Cavalier with the dark love-locks, or some one very like him, only not in the same picturesque costume, bending over me. Neither could I trust my ears, which seemed to hear the little King Charles's spaniel yelping and barking, as it jumped up and down on the thick piled carpet.

The sun, low in the east, was flooding the room with light. Its rays glinted in the oval mirror, on the knobs of the book-shelves, and the frames of the family pictures. But the brightest beam was reflected in the laughing dark eyes which met my first wondering glance.

It was not a Cavalier of the Stuart's time—not Prince Rupert—not the ghost of his sailor-brother, Prince Maurice, who stood before me: but a gentleman in a modern travelling dress of simple form and fashion, with no jewellery or lace ruffles; but with the noble brow, clearly cut features, and slender white hand, with tapering fingers, of an ancient race.

He was gazing at me with surprise equal to my own, and the little dog was half wild with excitement.

"In the name of all that is wonderful, how came you here?" he exclaimed, as in shamefaced astonishment, feeling myself blush crimson under his gaze, I tried to rise.

"No, don't disturb yourself. You looked so delightfully comfortable: I wish I had not awakened you. May I venture to ask whether you dropped down from the skies?"

"Or slipped through the key-hole, or down the chimney;" I said, recovering my self-possession. "No, I came to view the inside of

this curious old house. One of the keepers, who saw that I wished to do so, invited me in and left me here. I do not know what has become of him. He locked the door and I could not get out."

A shade passed over the laughing face, and darkened the gleaming eyes.

"Some miscreants, who were after the game, took aim at him in the dusk; you might have heard the shots."

I did remember, then, the sounds which had startled me out of my first brief unconsciousness.

"He is badly wounded, and we thought him delirious. He seemed trying to tell us something about a lady, and anxious about her, but we could make nothing out of it. His mother, who is my housekeeper, is gone to his lodge to help in nursing him."

"Oh, I hope he is not dangerously hurt," I said. "He was very kind in wishing to indulge my desire to see this ancient mansion. I trust I am not the cause of his suffering."

"No, no, it is not your fault, and I am the gainer," the young man said. "It is not often that this dull old house is blest with such a bright visitant. Did you see any ghosts before you fell asleep?"

"Nothing more spectral than those old pictures, which, in the gloaming, half-frightened me;" I said. "Now I will relieve you of my involuntary presence, and go back to the Rectory."

"I am glad we are such near neighbours;" said my host, whilst I took up my hat and scarf from the table near me and hurriedly put them on.

"Let me help you, and take care of you across the park. Not that there is any danger now, as poor Jerrold thought there might have been, no doubt, if you walked home alone; that must have been his reason for locking you in, meaning to return in a short time and release you. The fray last night ended in the capture of the ringleaders of a gang of as lawless rascals as ever infested these woodlands. Owing to an accidental circumstance, which brought me down here twenty-four hours before I was expected, I was just in time to take part in the scuffle, which nearly cost a brave, faithful young fellow his life; do not trouble about it. He is doing well now, and will recover more quickly when I relieve his mind of anxiety about his fair prisoner."

I did not refuse the offered escort. I was still trembling with excitement, and glad to lean on the kindly proffered arm of my new friend. Nor was that the only time it was my stay. Many were the walks in the woodland which followed that morning stroll over the dewy grass. First of all there was the young keeper to visit, and though he was no longer raving, he persisted in calling me "The Mistress." It did him good, he said, to see that I was none the worse for the night's adventure, and for being locked up in the old library. Then I must revisit the Manor House with my sister, and inspect all its treasures. The little spaniel always tried to get hold of the skirt of my

dress and pull me to the door of the room where we had so strangely so wonderingly made each other's acquaintance. I tried to resist its efforts. I did not want to revive the memory of such a ludicrous adventure, but circumstances were too strong for me; Emmeline wanted to see the room where I had spent the night when she was so terribly alarmed at my disappearance. By degrees my confusion wore off, and I did not shrink from and shun the revival of the strange coincidence of events. The library had a certain charm for me. The guests at the Manor House were of a quieter order than those who, in the old squire's life-time, had wearied my grave brother-in-law with fox-hunting stories and card-playing.

The new master was, as the Rector had said, a man of a different stamp—not less manly, nor less lively, but more thoughtful and of a higher type. They soon became fast friends, and the traveller's experiences threw new light on the book-lore of his studious neighbour.

The parties at the Manor House were not now exclusively confined to the masculine element. Emmeline was frequently asked for counsel, and invited to play the part of hostess, and I, of course, accompanied and assisted her

On one occasion, when the library was brilliantly lighted up, a strong contrast to its eerie state when night darkened there over my loneliness, I sat down apart from the rest of the company on the dark velvet couch, with the little King Charles's spaniel in his favourite position at my feet.

The young keeper had quite recovered, and had been promoted to a higher function. He was in great favour, which he chose to attribute to me. Whenever we met his face beamed with joy and gratitude.

"Do you not think, Honoria, that this sombre old Manor House would be all the better for a blithe young mistress?" said its owner, who had drawn near to tell me that the new head-keeper had been inquiring after "the mistress," and wanted to see and to thank me for his promotion. "You spent one night, not unhappily, under its roof. Cannot you make up your mind to brave the ghosts of Cavaliers and illustrious ladies and spend the rest of your life within its walls?"

The little dog barked and jumped coaxingly up into my lap. Eyes full of truth, and love, and happiness looked down pleadingly into mine, and I answered both appeals in one short word. "Yes."

THE MAJOR'S MISTAKE.

I.

"I ADMIT, sir, that this is a matter on which I have no right to speak with authority; but still I maintain that between husband and wife there should be no secrets."

And the Major leant back in his arm-chair.

"Well spoken, and like the true old bachelor that you are," laughed our host, Mr. Northcote. "But you might have been forced to change your views had you not taken good advice that night of the Cape Town Ball! Eh, Major?——That was before you went out to the Cape, my young friend," he added, turning to me.

"Your maxim is excellent, Major Morton," I replied, for the Major's remark was more particularly addressed to me. "But like most maxims it breaks down under peculiar and unusual circumstances."

"I cannot agree with you, sir," said the Major, somewhat stiffly. "A just law knows no exceptions."

"May I tell you the case of an intimate friend of my own," I said, "and ask you whether in that particular instance your maxim would not break down?"

"Certainly," replied the Major. And he lit another cigar.

"My friend was making a fair income in business, and married. All went well for awhile. And no husband and wife in England were happier or more united than they. Then came a period of depression. There was no life in trade, and business was slack. My friend and his wife had to pinch to make two ends meet."

"And thought themselves particularly ill-used by fate, I suppose," puffed the Major through his cigar.

"Things went from bad to worse. My friend grew more and more worried and harassed. His wife's heart ached to see how ill and wretched he looked. At last things came to a crisis. He told her that he had been a fool and worse; had speculated with the little capital they possessed; had lost all and more. Unless he could raise some three or four thousand pounds—and what hope had he of that?—their little home would be theirs no more."

"Three or four thousand pounds—eh?" growled the Major.

"Yes, and that without security. As you may suppose, he tried in vain to raise such a sum. Ruin and disgrace stared him in the face."

"Serve him right," ejaculated our host. But the Major was silent.

"And then one evening as he sat gazing into the fire, moody and utterly dejected, his wife came and knelt by his side, and lifted bright tearful eyes to his face, and said: 'I have never kept a secret from you,

dear, till now. No, not one. This is my first secret and, I pray, my last! Promise me never to ask how I came by this,' and she placed in his hands a draft for five thousand pounds."

The Major had risen and was pacing the room.

"When did this happen, and where?" he asked excitedly. "In England or at the Cape? And who is your friend? I have a right to know."

"But I, sir, have not the right to tell," I answered, astonished and somewhat bewildered by the effect of my story.

Mr. Northcote and I looked at each other inquiringly, as the Major continued pacing up and down the library, followed by enormous clouds of smoke. But my host was apparently as mystified as I was.

At last the Major stopped by my chair and said:

"Forgive me, sir; your story forcibly reminded me of a scene in my own life. I believe it to be true, and to have happened ten years ago, not in England, as your friend may have led you to suppose, but at the Cape. Do you know your friend's address?"

"I do," I answered; and as I stood and looked into his face I somehow grew to like this strange man whom I had known but for one short hour.

"And his wife—she who so nobly kept the secret—she is—is—living—and—well?"

"She is, and is in England," I replied, wondering at the break in his voice.

"Good! Write and tell her—*her*, remember, not him—that Major Morton would gladly see her. I shall stay in this neighbourhood a week in hopes of a reply.——I'll look in, and talk over old days to-morrow, Northcote," he added, turning to our host. "I'm strangely upset this evening, and will bid you good-night.—Good-night, sir," he said, holding out his hand to me. "You may not tell *me*, but I may tell *you* that your friend's name is Hardy. I have your promise to write to Mrs. Hardy."

"I will tell my friend's wife what you wish," I replied. And he left the room with Mr. Northcote.

II.

Mr. Northcote returned in a few minutes.

"I never saw the dear old Major in such a state before—never, save once," he said. "And by-the-bye, I must apologise for not introducing you formally to him. I thought you had met before. He seemed still more excited just now, when, on his asking me your name, I told him it was Hardy. Was it a brother of yours of whom you told us?"

"No," I replied evasively. "One of our family. The Hardys are numerous, you know. But tell me something about your strange friend."

"Well, to tell you the truth I don't know much about him myself. We saw a good deal of each other some ten or twelve years ago, when we were both at the Cape. And I saved him from making a fool of himself on one occasion. For which, by the way, he was not half so grateful as he ought to have been."

"How so?" I inquired.

"It's really hardly fair on the dear old Major, for no one could help liking him, notwithstanding his simplicity. A very child in business, I assure you. And yet I'm under no promise not to tell, like your cousin's wife. So as you've told the Major your friend's story, I'll give you an opportunity of telling him the Major's."

"Not if you think it should be kept a secret," I said. "You know my views on that subject."

"Why, I don't suppose the Major himself remembers one syllable about it. And there is not much to tell one way or another."

"Then, if it's betraying no secret, tell me by all means; for I feel a strange interest in the man."

"There was a grand ball given in the Exchange in Cape Town, and all the world was there, and the Major among the rest. I remember thinking it rather a bore myself, but going through with it as a matter of duty. When the whole thing was over, and I had sat down in my smoking-room to finish my cigar before turning in, I heard a hurried step outside, and with scarce a knock, in burst the Major, looking even more excited than he was to-night.

"'I want to consult you,' he said; 'can you give me an hour?'

"Of course I consented, though I was horribly tired. I always fancy that the Major, who was an unusually abstemious man, must have taken a glass or two of rather fiery Pontac that evening, and had a little lost his balance.

"'I want to consult you, Northcote,' he said. 'I fear I've done a foolish and a wicked thing to-night. I am engaged to be married.'

"'Goodness gracious, Major!' I cried, 'who on earth to?'

"'That's my business,' he said. 'You can give me your advice without knowing that.'

"'But if the deed's done, what advice can I offer?'

"'If it be a wrong deed, it shall be undone, with the help of God.'

"'Well, then, tell me all the circumstances.'

"Whereupon the Major told me that he had been able to do some few acts of kindness—not worth mentioning, he said—to the girl or her relations, and that he feared she had accepted him that night from gratitude and not from love; with much more to the same effect.

"Of course I saw at once how the land lay. The old Major had enjoyed his glass or two of Pontac—enough to make the blood course freely in his veins,—and had made a fool of himself; proposed to a pretty girl, who was glad enough to accept him for his money, the artful little puss. And now in the cooler morning hours, as the effects of the wine were passing off, and the blood pulsated more quietly in

his veins, he began to find out his mistake, and only wanted a little encouragement to get out of the whole business.

"'Of course you must get out of it, Major,' I said. 'The thing's absurd. If you take my advice you'll sit down, now you're calmer'—for the poor man was looking quite crestfallen—'and square matters by writing her a comfortable cheque. You say she is not well off. Of course she accepted you for your money. That's obvious enough. Depend upon it she'll jump at it. Come. I'll give you pen, ink and paper. Take my advice and don't delay a moment.'

"'Not now, not now,' he said mournfully. A man, you see, doesn't care about throwing away a few hundreds even when he's naturally of an absurdly generous turn like the Major. 'Not now,' he said. 'I'll see her in the morning.'

"What actually happened I can't say. But, as I heard nothing more of the Major's engagement, I suppose he choked off the little lass somehow, and wisely abstained for the future from Pontac. Fortunate thing he consulted a man of the world, eh?"

"Did you ever learn who she was?" I asked.

"Never. There's no doubt the Major did well to consult me. But somehow we never got on so well together after that. I suppose he could not forget that I knew how he had singed his wings."

III.

It was with aching head and troubled mind that I walked home beneath the midnight stars. I had promised the Major to tell my wife—for it was my own story that I had narrated as that of my friend—that he wished to see her. I had unintentionally learnt her secret, in part at least; and I had also learnt his secret, in part also. But there was still much that was not clear. What course ought I to adopt? I had promised my wife, long ago, never to try in any way to find out the one secret she was forced to keep from me. And yet I could not now rest until I knew all. Was it to the Major that I was indebted for a sum of money which I could not hope to repay for many a long year, even if he would consent to accept it from me? Had I even a right to demand that I should be permitted some day to refund that which was not a loan to myself but a free gift to my wife? One thing alone was clear—to my wife I must make a clean breast of all I had learnt.

She listened with tearful eyes to my account of what had passed, and since I already knew so much she told me all.

She had first met the Major when she was a teacher in a school in Cape Town. She had been irresistibly drawn towards a man who, to her young eyes, seemed a very ideal gentleman; whose perfect courtesy knew no distinctions of rank; who showed a genuine interest in her work; and whose simple straightforward words of advice seemed insensibly to raise her standard of duty.

Her mother at that time was taken ill, with a sickness which was unto death. He noticed her worn and anxious look, and gently asked if she were in trouble. She told him of her mother's illness. He sent presents of wine and fruit: called himself to see them in their cottage home, begged her to send him some flower paintings for a bazaar in which he was interested, and apologised for paying pounds where shillings were expected. In a thousand ways he helped where help was much needed. Then came her mother's death. She saw the Major no more, though kindly presents came to remind her and her sister of his generous heart.

So the time went by till the night of the Exchange ball, and he asked her to be his wife. His gentleness and courtesy, she said, were so exquisite, that she felt if she could not love him like a lover, she could honour him as the prince of gentlemen, and could be happy with him as his wife. If it was not ardent love, it was not mere gratitude that prompted her. It was a deep reverence, and earnest admiration of a man whom she felt to be above all others that she had known—noble and pure, true and unselfish.

And then next day he came to her, and with gentle humility bowed his great iron-grey head before her. He had sinned against God and man, he said, in asking her to be his wife. God's law was like to like; and he was old and grey, she young and in all the pure freshness of early life. Man he knew would blame him, and justly blame him, if he accepted her consent, founded not on fresh young love, but on generous womanly gratitude. For any pain he had caused her, he asked her forgiveness. He was too old to make her happy. His touch would only chill the warmth of her bright young life. And when she told him with quickened breath and trembling voice that she was indeed still his, if so he would, he gently told her that she must not tempt him to sin against his conscience.

A month afterwards he left the Cape. And on the day of his departure wrote to her and said that he had placed in his agent's hands a sum of money to be at her entire disposal should she ever have occasion to need it, under the sole condition that in such a case she should honour him, and him alone, with her confidence.

IV.

It was, I think, some five years after I had learnt my wife's secret —when I had learnt too to reverence the Major's character as she had always reverenced it—that I was summoned to his death-bed. His last words were of her; and next his heart, suspended by a silken thread, was an old, worn-out watch-key she had once given him in playful mood.

BRETON FISHERMAN'S SONG.

We were three sailors—sailors of Croix,
We were three sailors—sailors of Croix,
Homeward bound in the *Saint François*.
How the winds blow!
'Tis the wind of the sea torments us so.

He fell overboard in the raging sea,
Overboard and lost in the raging sea!
The other two go sorrowfully.
How the winds blow!
'Tis the wind of the sea torments us so.

His cap was all that they found of him,
His cap and pipe—that they found of him,
Although they looked till their eyes were dim.
How the winds blow!
'Tis the wind of the sea torments us so.

His mother went to the shrine to pray,
His mother went to the shrine to pray;
She prayed to the good Saint Anne d'Auray.
How the winds blow!
'Tis the wind of the sea torments us so.

"Good Saint Anne, give me back my son!
Good Saint Anne, give me back my son!"
The good Saint Anne when her prayer was done—
How the winds blow!
'Tis the wind of the sea torments us so—

The good Saint Anne to her thus replies,
In sorrow and pity to her replies,
"At eve thou shalt meet him in Paradise."
How the winds blow!
'Tis the wind of the sea torments us so.

Back to the village she went her way,
In joy and gladness she went her way.
They found her dead at the close of day.
How the winds blow!
'Tis the wind of the sea torments us so!

C. E. Meetkerke.

THE HOUSEKEEPER, WITH AN ELABORATE CURTSEY AND A THIN ACID SMILE, TOOK HER LEAVE.

THE ARGOSY.

MAY, 1894.

THE GREY MONK.

By T. W. Speight, Author of "The Mysteries of Heron Dyke."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FALSE HEIR.

SIR GILBERT CLARE'S deliberate announcement, evidently not made without a purpose, that the family estates were no longer entailed, was one which carried dismay to the heart of Captain Verinder. His face fell on the instant, and for a little while the ruddy colour faded out of his cheeks. Although aware that the baronet's eyes were glancing keenly from him to Giovanna, and then back, he could not for the life of him help showing that the blow had struck home.

Sir Gilbert smiled grimly to himself.

"As I thought, this fellow is at the bottom of the business," he murmured, but this time not aloud. "It is he who has found me out and induced his niece to lay her case before me, evidently in the expectation of being able to feather his nest out of her, or me, or both of us. Well, we shall see. As regards his niece, I am more than ever inclined to believe in her. The story she told me was remarkably clear and straightforward. But *festina lente* must still be my motto."

Then he rose. "And now, my dear madam," he said, addressing himself pointedly to Giovanna and wholly ignoring the Captain, "I must ask you to excuse me till to-morrow, when I shall expect to see you here, accompanied by your son, at the same hour as to-day. I would not have quitted you so abruptly but that I have a couple of my tenant farmers waiting all this time to see me about some repairs. But you must not leave the Chase without partaking of some refresh ment. Pardon me if I insist. I cannot sit down with you myself, I

am sorry to say, for I am under the strictest dietetic regimen. They are terrible tyrants, these doctors. Till to-morrow at eleven, then."

Therewith he shook hands cordially with Giovanna, but the Captain he merely favoured with a curt nod, as it might be a nod of dismissal to one of his dependents; and, indeed, he had already made up his mind that he had seen quite enough of Captain Verinder.

Presently a servant appeared with a liberally appointed luncheon tray, at sight of which the Captain brightened visibly, for he was one of those men to whom the good things of the table never appeal in vain.

It was not till they were jogging back to the station in their fly, which had been kept waiting for them, that Giovanna said: "I am not sure that I quite got at the meaning of Sir Gilbert's speech about what he called the entail. Does it mean that—— But perhaps you had better tell me what it does mean."

The Captain drew down the corners of his mouth. "Oh, there's no possible mistake about his meaning. It seems that your husband was so unspeakably foolish as, in return for the sum of six thousand pound, to deprive himself and his heirs of what otherwise would have been their undoubted birthright. Thus the estate of Withington Chase, and other estates into the bargain, for anything I know to the contrary, instead of descending through the law of entail to Sir Gilbert's grandson (whom we hope to have the pleasure of introducing to him to-morrow), have, as the result of that act, become the baronet's sole and personal property, to sell, or give away, or do what the dickens he likes with. I wish with all my heart that John Alexander Clare had been at the bottom of the Red Sea before putting his hand to any such iniquitous document."

"Then, if Sir Gilbert chooses to adopt Luigi as his grandson it does not follow that he will come into the property?"

"It certainly does not follow that he will; but neither does it follow that he won't. Everything hinges on how Sir Gilbert takes to him. If Luigi plays his cards skilfully, there's no reason why he should not come in for everything when the old gentleman dies. On the other hand, if he plays them badly, he may be left without a shilling."

"And the title?" queried Giovanna.

"Oh, the title can't be cut off as the entail has been. That descends to the next heir, whoever he may be, and nothing can deprive him of it. But where would be the good of the title, I should like to know, without the means to keep it up? It would be a white elephant—worse than useless. Everything depends on Luigi."

"He seems to me a rather clever young man."

"Oh yes, he's clever enough in his way," said the Captain with a short laugh. "The question is whether he's not a little bit too clever. There lies our danger."

This was rather beyond Giovanna; but, as their fly drew up next minute at the station, nothing more was said; and as there were several other passengers in the compartment by which they travelled up

to town, all further private conversation was deferred till they reached Giovanna's rooms, where they found Luigi impatiently awaiting their arrival.

The young Italian was a rank coward both morally and physically, and when told that he would have to face Sir Gilbert Clare on the morrow in his assumed *rôle* of grandson to the baronet, his cheeks blanched and a nervous trembling took possession of him, which was not allayed till the Captain had administered to him a tolerably stiff dose of brandy.

As already stated, Luigi was a fairly good-looking young man. He was tall and slender, with a pale olive complexion and clear cut features of an almost purely Greek type. His eyes were large, black and expressive, and the knowledge of how to make the most of them had come to him by intuition, as it does to the majority of his race. Jet black, soft and silky were his hair and moustache. He was very proud of his long tapering hands, and his carefully trimmed nails. Some of his friends said they were the hands of an artist, others, less complimentary, averred that he had the digits of a pickpocket. Both statements went beyond the mark, as the generality of extreme statements do, for although Luigi Rispani was a fairly clever drawing-master, he was entirely lacking in the creative faculty, and although he had no moral scruples whatever in lending himself to a scheme for defrauding Sir Gilbert Clare, nothing less than hard compulsion—a twinge of starvation, for instance—would have induced him to insert his hand into another man's pocket and abstract therefrom a watch or purse. In the opinion of some people a transaction of the latter kind would have been much more venial than the one to which he had given his assent, but such was not Luigi Rispani's way of thinking, and such is not the way of thinking of thousands of others.

Our three conspirators did not separate till a late hour, for, on the strength of his coming good fortune, Luigi had already thrown up his post at the theatre. As a matter of course, the Captain was spokesman-in-chief. He it was who thought out every detail and strove to foresee and provide against every contingency which might unexpectedly crop up at the morrow's interview. The others had little to do beyond listening and assenting and trying to fix in their memory, so that they might be available at the right moment, the different points enumerated by him.

In matters of business Captain Verinder was punctuality itself, and our little party of three pulled up at the door of Withington Chase as the turret clock was striking eleven. Having been ushered into the morning room as before, they were left to themselves for a few minutes. Then the footman reappeared with a request that "the lady and the young gentleman" would be good enough to follow him. Before quitting the room he rather ostentatiously placed a couple of newspapers on the centre table.

Captain Verinder was left alone; he realised the fact unpleasantly.

Starting to his feet, he began to pace the room with anything but placid strides. His face turned a purplish red, he shook his clenched hands at an imaginary foe, and anathematised Sir Gilbert in tones not loud but deep. He was quite aware that the baronet had conceived an unaccountable dislike for him, but he had not thought it would take a form of such active hostility as had now evinced itself. It was more than a slight—it was an insult—as he fumingly told himself: but all the same, it was one which he was not in a position to resent.

After all, as he assured himself when he had in some measure calmed down, it was really a matter of little moment, even if Sir Gilbert should continue to ignore him; he might feel sore at the time, but he would soon get over that. The great point was that the scheme he had so carefully elaborated was on the high road to success; the rest, as far as he was concerned, was a trifling matter indeed. Let but Luigi and Vanna attain to the positions he had designated them for, and henceforth with him—Augustus Verinder—all would go well. Farewell, then, to his existence of semi-genteel pauperism, and to his long struggle against a fate which had so persistently turned a cold shoulder to him, and would have none of his wooing! For the rest of his days he would be able to live as a gentleman ought to live.

On leaving the morning-room, Giovanna and Luigi were conducted to the library, where they found Sir Gilbert awaiting them. The baronet received them with that frigid ceremoniousness to which Giovanna was becoming accustomed by this time, but which did not tend to put Luigi more at his ease. But the mere fact of Sir Gilbert betraying no outward signs of perturbation afforded no gauge by which to measure the depth of the emotions at work below. All his life it had been natural to him to mask his feelings, and at his age it was not to be expected that he should alter. In reality, he was profoundly moved—a fact which increased, rather than diminished, the ingrained austerity of his manner, and deepened the vertical line between his shaggy eyebrows.

"Madam, I wish you a very good day," he said, as he took Giovanna's hand for a moment and bent over it. "You are punctuality itself—a commendable virtue in your sex! but one, unless they are somewhat belied, more honoured by them in the breach than the observance."

Sir Gilbert's banter, on the very rare occasions on which he condescended to indulge in it, was of a somewhat ponderous and old-fashioned kind. Not that he was in any bantering mood to-day—far from it; his only object was, by means of it, the more effectually to conceal the inward tremor which had seized him now the moment had come which was to give him a grandson to take the place of the son whom he had banished long years before.

For the moment Giovanna found nothing to say in reply. For the first time she seemed to realise the enormity of the fraud to

which she had lent herself, and the shame of it. But it was too late to go back even had she been willing to do so—which was doubtful: for it is no uncommon experience for a person to recognise to the full the blackness of any wrong-doing in which he or she may be engaged, and yet not to falter, or swerve for a moment from the line of action they have laid down for themselves.

"And this, madam, is the grandson whom you have brought from the kingdom of Nowhere to make me a present of," continued Sir Gilbert as he faced Luigi.

"This, sir, is your grandson, Lewis Clare," replied Giovanna in quiet measured tones.

"Lewis Clare!—why Lewis?" demanded the old man, turning quickly on her.

"It was the name his father chose for him. Was there not—pardon the question—a certain Colonel Lewis Clare, who lived a great number of years ago and who fell in battle?"

The baronet nodded.

"It was after him that my husband named the boy," added Giovanna, her black eyes looking Sir Gilbert unflinchingly in the face.

"He might have done worse—he might have done very much worse. It is a name to be proud of, madam."

Then he again faced Luigi, eyeing him critically and keenly.

"So, sir, I am given to understand that you have been brought up in England, consequently I presume that you speak the English language as well as I do."

"Scarcely that, I am afraid, sir," answered Luigi with a glint of his white teeth; "although I pride myself on being more of an Englishman than an Italian."

"Then you belie your looks," muttered the old man as he turned abruptly away. He was bitterly disappointed. His secret hope had been to find another Alec, in any case as far as looks were concerned; for of late years the memory of his eldest son (through a reactionary process by no means uncommon when one whom we have treated ill or unjustly is lost to us for ever) had become very dear to him. But in this olive-skinned, black-eyed stripling, with his facile smile and gleaming teeth, he could trace no single trait or feature which served to recall his dead son. Voice, looks, manner, all were radically different; there was no shadow of resemblance anywhere.

"Still, he is my grandson, and for Alec's sake——" he murmured brokenly under his breath. "It would be altogether unjust to blame the boy, or to treat him in any way differently for what, after all, is no fault of his."

He had turned to the table and was making a pretence of searching among the papers and books with which it was encumbered for something which he apparently failed to find. Behind his back Giovanna and Luigi exchanged glances of perplexity and dismay. Drawing himself up with a sort of half-shake, as if trying to free himself

from some harassing thought, and with a sigh meant for himself alone, Sir Gilbert again faced round.

"Pardon my remissness," he said with a little gesture of annoyance, on perceiving that both his visitors were still standing, "but it is not every day that one is presented with a grandson. Pray be seated," he added, and not till they had complied did he find a chair for himself.

He was evidently nonplussed what to say or do next. Although his disappointment was so extreme, and although he felt drawn towards Luigi by no frailest thread of affinity or kinship, he was sternly determined in his own mind that the fullest justice should be done to him, and that his position as the heir of Withington Chase should receive the amplest recognition both at his hands and those of the world at large. Perhaps—and who could say to the contrary?—liking would come in time. Perhaps, although it seemed hard to believe, the boy might gradually win his way to his grandfather's heart and become unspeakably dear to him.

"Your mother, young sir, tells me that for some time past you have been earning your living as a drawing-master," resumed Sir Gilbert when the silence had become painful to all three. He could not, just yet, bring himself to address his grandson after any more familiar or affectionate style.

"That is so, sir, and a very poor living I made of it."

"Ah—ha!" interjected Sir Gilbert, but whether by way of expressing approval, or disapproval, his hearers could not tell.

"You see, sir, there are so many drawing-masters not merely with more experience than I, but with more natural ability to begin with."

"Come now, that is well said, and becoming in a young fellow of your age: although, on the other hand, it is not perhaps advisable—more especially nowadays when everybody seems to make a point of blowing his or her special trumpet as loudly as possible—to underestimate yourself or treat yourself too diffidently. But tell me now, what you can do, or what you think you could do if the opportunity were afforded you. You have tastes, gifts, qualifications of some kind, I suppose?"

"If so, sir, they and I have hardly made acquaintance as yet. Both money and leisure have been such scarce commodities with me, and I have had to work so hard for my living that I suppose I hardly know myself as I really am, or perhaps I ought to say, as I should have been had the circumstances of my life been different."

"There is good sense in what you say. Your modesty becomes you."

Thanks to the Captain's coaching, it was evident that Luigi had already succeeded in creating a favourable impression.

"You have had no opportunity of learning to ride, or shoot, I suppose?" queried Sir Gilbert.

"None whatever, sir."

"Um—that's a pity! What about the classics? Have you any knowledge of Latin, or Greek?

Luigi shook his head.

"Not the slightest, sir. Of course I know Italian as well as I know English, or better. French, too, I speak with some degree of fluency; but beyond that I am afraid you will find me nothing better than a rank duffer."

Sir Gilbert pricked up his ears.

"I hope you are not addicted to the use of slang, sir, as your last phrase would seem to imply," he said severely. "To me there are few things more detestable. Pray let me never hear any more of it."

Luigi was wise enough to refrain from replying. He simply coloured up and did his best to look ashamed.

Presently the baronet rose. It was a signal to which the others at once responded.

"To-day is Thursday," he said. "Come to me again at noon on Monday next. I have much to think of, many things to consider, but by that time I shall probably have arrived at some decision with regard to certain matters which materially concern all now present. Till then, good-bye."

As he held Giovanna's hand for a moment he said, "I am not aware there is any necessity for Captain Verinder's presence here again. Um—um—it is immensely kind of him to have interested himself as he has, but I should be sorry to put him to any further trouble in the affair." With his right hand grasping that of Luigi, he placed his left in kindly fashion on the young man's shoulder. "You and I, in all probability, will be much better acquainted by-and-by. In any case, I think I may safely say that the fault will rest with you if we are not."

No faintest suspicion clouded Sir Gilbert's mind that he was clasping the hand of an impostor.

CHAPTER XIX.

LUIGI ACKNOWLEDGED.

As on the previous day, luncheon was provided for the baronet's visitors, and, as before, they partook of it without his presence.

Giovanna, in her clear simple way, related to her uncle all that had passed—all except that last speech of Sir Gilbert, which she left to be told later on.

The Captain rubbed his hands gleefully.

"All has gone well so far, very well indeed," he said; "and now that the worst is over—by which I mean now that Luigi has been introduced to the old man and accepted by him as his grandson, as, from what you tell me, seems undoubtedly to be the case—now that

the most difficult part of our task has been successfully accomplished, I don't mind saying that I shall sleep more soundly to-night than I have for the last week or more."

"It seems to me that Sir Gilbert favoured me with a precious cool reception," said Luigi, in an aggrieved tone; "in fact it was enough to freeze one. And those eyes of his seemed to go right through me; I was never so nervous in my life. I wouldn't go through such a quarter of an hour again for a good deal."

"There will be no call for you to do so," replied the Captain. "As I said before, you have gone through the worst. You know now the kind of man he is, and must act accordingly. If you only knew how"—adding, to himself, "and were not so self-opinionated and conceited"—"you might lead Sir Gilbert anywhere with your little finger. In the case of such a man, you have only to fall in with his humours, or make believe to fall in with them, and you may do anything in reason with him."

"If I had but your head on my shoulders, uncle!" exclaimed Luigi, with a smile that had a spice of mockery in it.

"Or my brains in your numbskull," retorted the Captain. "Oh, the chance—the golden chance that is now yours! One can but hope that you will know how to make the best of it."

It seemed to Giovanna that the time had now come for making her uncle acquainted with what Sir Gilbert had said about him. The Captain pulled a wry face for a moment, and then broke into one of his short harsh laughs.

"What a cantankerous old shaver he is!" he exclaimed. "I was sure from the first that he had taken a dislike to me." Then laying a hand on his niece's arm, he added in a voice which had become suddenly grave: "It matters not a grain of salt in what light Sir Gilbert chooses to regard me, so long as you and Luigi—especially the boy—contrive to keep in his good graces. That is the only thing of any real consequence."

For the next few days Sir Gilbert felt thoroughly unsettled and out of sorts. His ordinary avocations seemed to have lost all interest for him; he was unable to fix his attention on anything outside the special current of his thoughts for more than a few minutes at a time. He shut himself up in his own room, a small apartment which opened out of the library, and even Everard Lisle was only admitted to the briefest possible audience each forenoon. His mental attitude at this time was a puzzle to himself. A wonderful thing had come to pass. One which, had an inkling of it been permitted him beforehand, he should have assured himself could not fail to fill his few remaining days with a happiness undreamt of, and almost too deep to find expression in words. A gift, the most precious of any he could have asked for (seeing that we cannot bring back our lost ones from the tomb), had been vouchsafed to him, yet, strange to say, he felt little or none of that elation which would have seemed the natural

outcome of such a state of affairs. Why was this, and to what cause was it attributable? He tried to look forward to the presence of his newly-found grandson as to something that would crown his life with a blessing, and to mentally picture their daily life together in time to come, but he derived no pleasure from the process; neither did the future, now that he looked at it with fresh eyes, as it were, take to itself any added brightness from the fact that a son of his son would succeed him when the time should have come for him to pass into the Silent Land.

"Is it that my heart is dead?" he sadly asked himself, "or is it because I am so old and have gone through so much, that only the ghost of either joy or sorrow will ever keep me company again? Or is it," he went on, "because in this youth who has so suddenly intruded himself into my life I can discern nothing that serves to recall his father to memory, nor any likeness, however vague, to any of my pictured ancestors in the long gallery—who are his ancestors also—that I seem in no way drawn towards him? I cannot tell why it is so. I only know that it is."

In one respect, however, he derived a certain amount of mordant satisfaction from the knowledge that he would now be followed by an heir in the direct line of descent. His detested kinsman, Colonel Eustace Clare, who, he felt sure, never missed a day without hoping it would bring the tidings of his death, would now, at what might be termed the eleventh hour, be baulked of his chance of succession to the title, even as the cutting off of the entail in years gone by had deprived him of all prospect of ever succeeding to the estates.

Monday at noon brought Giovanna and Luigi again to the Chase. Verinder had kept them company as far as Mapleford station, where they all alighted. It had been arranged that he should await, either their return, or the receipt of some message from them, at the railway hotel, it being impossible to say how long Sir Gilbert might choose to detain them. The Captain's impatience would not admit of his quietly awaiting their return in London.

If Sir Gilbert received his guests without any particular display of cordiality he yet greeted them with a grave and kindly courtesy which went far towards putting them at their ease. For the time the more brusque and imperious traits of his character failed to assert themselves: indeed, no stranger seeing him on this occasion only, would have as much as suspected their existence. To-day he kept the others company at luncheon, although all he partook of was a biscuit and a glass of Madeira. By special invitation Everard Lisle made a fourth at table.

When once Sir Gilbert had made up his mind to acknowledge Giovanna as his daughter-in-law, and Luigi as his grandson, he was not a man to stick at half measures. The acknowledgment should be full and complete, and Everard Lisle was the person he chose to whom first to communicate his intentions, with which purpose in

view he invited him to dine at the Chase on Sunday. It was as they sat together after dinner that Sir Gilbert broke his news.

"For the present I shall have the boy to live with me," he said. "I want us to become better acquainted. My daughter-in-law, if she chooses to do so, can take up her residence at Maylings, the family dower-house, although not used as such in my time, which has stood empty since old Miss Hopkins's death three years ago. Of course the news that my grandson and his mother have been received and acknowledged by me will very soon get noised abroad, and as you are likely, owing to your being at the Chase so much, to be appealed to on the point by a number of people, I want you to be in a position to confirm the accuracy of the report and to give it the stamp of verity. That all sorts of ridiculous stories will get about, originating in the fact of my grandson's and daughter-in-law's existence not having been made public till now, I do not doubt, but with any, or all, such inventions you need have nothing to do. We have simply to deal with the two or three plain facts of the case."

Thus it fell out that Everard Lisle was already prepared for the meeting on Monday. The baronet introduced him simply as "My secretary, Mr. Lisle."

As Luigi did not proffer his hand, Everard contented himself by bowing slightly. But Sir Gilbert did not fail to notice the omission.

"Where is your hand, sir?" he demanded of his pseudo grandson with a drawing together of his shaggy brows. "Let me tell you that, young as Mr. Lisle is, I hold him in the highest esteem and regard."

Luigi smilingly hastened to repair his oversight. He was quick-witted enough in some things. "A favourite, evidently," he said to himself with an almost imperceptible shrug. "I suppose it will be to my interest to keep in with this fellow for the present, but when it comes to my turn he shall very soon be presented with the order of his going."

It seemed to Lisle that the best thing he could do would be to draw young Clare into talk over luncheon and leave Sir Gilbert and Mrs. Clare to get on together as best they could. Luigi responded readily enough to Everard's advances, all he asked just then being to be left alone by his "grandfather," whom he still regarded with secret fear and trembling, the enormity of the fraud of which he had been guilty impressing itself far more unpleasantly on his consciousness when in the presence of the baronet than at any other time. Both the young men were careful to confine their talk to the merest generalities. Both of them were on their guard, neither of them could tell yet what his future relations towards the other might develop into.

As for the baronet, he proceeded to mount one of his antiquarian hobbies (it may have been of set purpose, and in order to save both Giovanna and himself the awkwardness of having to make talk about nothing in particular) and ambled on, apparently to the content of both himself and his listener. Nothing more was required of Mrs.

Clare than to look interested and to interject an occasional "Yes," or "No," or "Indeed," at the proper moment, all of which she did to perfection, although three-fourths of Sir Gilbert's monologue was clearly beyond her comprehension.

When luncheon was over, the baronet, turning to Everard, said: "Mr. Lisle, I want you to be good enough to conduct Mrs. Clare and my grandson over the house and grounds, and to show them everything worth seeing. Mrs. Burton will place herself at your disposal as far as the house is concerned, and you can impound Shotover to show you over the gardens, and so forth. For myself, I am sorry that the infirmities of age should have so far prevailed over me as to preclude me from undertaking a task which otherwise would have been one of unmixed pleasure. You will find me in the library when you have finished your peregrination: but there is no need whatever for you to hurry yourselves."

CHAPTER XX.

SIR GILBERT'S DECISION.

THE Mrs. Burton referred to by Sir Gilbert was housekeeper at the Chase, having held that position since the death of the second Lady Clare. She was a widow, middle-aged, thin, prim, and as upright as a dart, and was still able to pride herself on the slimness of her figure. Her manners pertained to what might be termed the severely genteel school. She was careful to impress upon everyone with whom she was brought into contact that she was "a lady by birth," but it was a statement which she evidently intended people to accept unfortified by any particulars of her parentage and early history, with regard to which, indeed, it was noticed that she was studiously reticent. Her peculiarities notwithstanding, she made an excellent housekeeper, and the baronet valued her accordingly.

It had not been often in the course of her uneventful existence that anyone had succeeded in more than faintly stirring the chilly shallows of Mrs. Burton's gentility, but this morning she had been more nearly startled out of her propriety than had happened to her since her advent at Withington Chase.

Sir Gilbert had sent for her immediately after breakfast, and without a word of preface, and with no more apparent concern than if he were giving his orders about dinner, had said:

"Mrs. Burton, I am expecting two people to luncheon to-day whom you have never yet seen, and probably never as much as heard of. They are my daughter-in-law and my grandson. After luncheon I should like them to be shown by you over the house. Mr. Lisle will accompany them in my place. So if you will kindly hold yourself in readiness and meanwhile give orders for the shutters of the unused

rooms to be thrown open, and for an article or two of furniture here and there to be uncovered, I shall feel obliged."

Mrs. Burton had issued the requisite orders and had then shut herself up in her room to think over the astounding news which had just been told her, while endeavouring to regain her much-disturbed equanimity. She was one of those women who seem to have a special faculty for ferreting out every particular, or incident of consequence in the career of anyone in whom they are interested, and she had flattered herself that there was no fact of any moment in the life of Sir Gilbert with which she was not already acquainted. To-day, however, he had proved to her how egregiously she had been mistaken. A daughter-in-law and a grandson, and she, Felicia Burton, not to have known of their existence! She felt as if Sir Gilbert had put a grievous personal affront upon her.

But she was her usual prim, precise, close-lipped self when in her dress of black satin, a heavy gold chain round her neck, her faded hair crowned with a tasteful lace cap, and carrying a bunch of highly polished keys, she proceeded to show the little party over what might be termed the state apartments of the old mansion, not one of which had been entered by Sir Gilbert since his second wife's death. From room to room they went in leisurely fashion—the large drawing-room, the small ditto, "my lady's boudoir," the state dining-room, and so on, taking each in turn; and then upstairs, where a couple of the "best bedrooms" invited inspection—each and all being denuded of carpets and curtains, and of everything except its own special suite of furniture. Still, no great exercise of the imagination was needed to picture what those spacious and stately apartments must at one time have looked like, nor what they might very easily be made to look like again. Last of all they came to the picture-gallery, where the housekeeper, with an elaborate courtesy and a thin acid smile, took her leave.

"What a rummy old card!" was Luigi's outspoken comment almost before her back was turned.

"Lewis, how can you speak of her in that way?" exclaimed Giovanna. "To me she has something of the air of a broken-down duchess."

"As if you had ever seen a broken-down duchess, mother!" retorted the young man flippantly.

"Mrs. Burton is a lady by birth—at least, so she gives everyone to understand," remarked Everard drily. "And now, Mr. Clare, here we are among the painted effigies of your ancestors. I have already made the acquaintance of most of them, as far as it is possible for a man still in the flesh to do so. Would you like me to introduce you to any of them?"

"N—no, I think not. Fact is, I don't care a rap about the whole boiling of 'em."

"Idiot!" hissed Giovanna in his ear. Then turning to Everard with a smile, she said:

"I am afraid my son is falling into an absurd habit—sadly too common among the young men of to-day—of depreciating things which they really understand and care about, although they won't admit it. One day I must show you some of Lewis's drawings and water-colours. He has done nothing in oils as yet, I believe. I fancy they will rather surprise you."

"What rubbish you talk, mother!" exclaimed Luigi.

"By the way," continued Mrs. Clare without heeding him, "if among these portraits there is one of my son's namesake, the Colonel Lewis Clare who was killed in battle, I should certainly like to have it pointed out to me."

Luigi yawned openly.

"I am sorry not to be able to gratify your wish," responded Lisle. "No portrait of Colonel Clare is known to be in existence."

From the gallery they made their way by a side door into the grounds, where Shotover, the gardener, was awaiting them.

Among other things at the Chase which had suffered from neglect since Lady Clare's death, owing to Sir Gilbert's penurious style of living, were the gardens and glass-houses, for whereas Shotover had formerly had four able-bodied assistants under him, himself and a youth had now to attend to everything. As a consequence, many things had to be left undone, or only half done, much to the old fellow's disgust. To-day, however, a whisper had reached him that the young gentleman whom he was presently to show over the grounds was none other than his master's grandson and heir—although where he had so suddenly sprung from nobody seemed to know—and he determined to turn the opportunity to account in the way of pointing out the difference between past and present as far as his department was concerned, in the hope that his doing so might be the means before long of bringing about a more desirable state of affairs.

It was by no means displeasing to Luigi to be addressed by Shotover in such deferential terms, and to be appealed to almost as if he were already master of everything he saw around him. In return he put on a very gracious and affable demeanour, which secretly tickled Lisle even while it annoyed him, and agreed with Shotover that matters were in a very bad way indeed, and that he would not fail to bear in mind all that he had seen and heard while they had been together. He had already decided in his own mind upon several alterations and improvements originating in certain hints skilfully thrown out by the old man.

But all his new-found sense of self-importance vanished the moment he found himself back in Sir Gilbert's presence. He could not have told himself why it should be so, but the fact was that under the baronet's keen and penetrating gaze he seemed to shrink and wither, to have, as it were, every rag of self-deception stripped off him and made to recognise himself for the sorry scamp and swindler that he was. Small wonder that he felt he would rather be anywhere than in

the company of his "grandfather." Had he had to deal with almost any other kind of man he would have tried to curry favour by fawning and flattery, but something told him that in the present case such a course would be about the worst he could adopt. He tried to console himself with the hope that when he should have seen more of Sir Gilbert, and so have become more accustomed to his presence, this very disagreeable feeling would gradually wear itself away.

Lisle having some outdoor business to attend to left the others at the door of the library and went his way. Mrs. Clare's stately beauty had not failed to impress him. He had found her somewhat reserved, and, while listening with apparent interest to all he had to say, originating few remarks of her own. He had, however, judged this reticence to be natural to her and not merely put on as a cloak for the occasion; and, in so thinking, he was not very wide of the mark, for at no time had Giovanna been a talkative woman, and now that she found herself in a sphere so new and strange it seemed to her that, for the present at all events, her wisest course was to listen to everyone and say as little as possible in return, and by so doing afford others no opportunity of gauging the depths of her ignorance.

Lisle found himself somewhat at sea when it came to a question of summing up Luigi. Sir Gilbert had furnished him with no information as to how and where the young man had been brought up, and, in lack of some such data, he felt as if he were floundering in the dark. Lewis Clare spoke English with the ease and fluency of one to the manner born, even to the point, judging from certain of his remarks, of being an adept in slang. That he was not a gentleman in himself was certain, and it was equally certain that he lacked the indefinable *cachet* of one who has been in the habit of mixing in good society. Yet it would be perhaps scarcely correct to call him vulgar, using the term in its commoner acceptation. "None the less, he's a conceited, ignorant young puppy," concluded Lisle, "and the chances are that, with a free hand given him, he will develop by-and-by into something still more objectionable. Where has he sprung from, I wonder? and for what reason has he been kept in the background all these years? Can it have been that Sir Gilbert himself had no knowledge till lately of the existence of such a descendant?"

But these were vain questions, as Everard Lisle was well aware.

"And now," said Sir Gilbert after he had put a few questions, chiefly to Giovanna, on her and Luigi's return from their round—"and now the time has come for me to enlighten you with regard to my intentions—that is to say, as far as they have reference to the present state of affairs. In what way I may see fit in time to come to change, modify, or even to wholly cancel the arrangements I now propose to make it is of course impossible for me even to conjecture. As for you, young sir," turning to Luigi, "you will, for the present, take up your quarters here. There are certain acquirements to which you

have hitherto had no opportunity of devoting yourself, but without at least a smattering of which no gentleman's education can be considered complete. You are not too old to learn, and I shall look to you to do your utmost, under proper tuition and surveillance, to remedy the defects in question. I shall, of course, make you a certain money allowance, the amount of which I have not yet determined, but I tell you at once that although it will, in my opinion, be amply sufficient to meet the unavoidable *menus frais* of a person in your position, it will not admit of your launching into any extravagances or unnecessary expenses. And now one word of caution. See to it that on no account you allow yourself to become involved in debt. That is one of the few things I should find it difficult to overlook."

Poor Luigi felt as if his heart were on the point of sinking into his boots.

Without waiting for a word in reply the baronet turned to Giovanna.

"What I have to propose, my dear madam, for your acceptance as the widow of my eldest son, is an allowance of four hundred pounds per annum to be paid you quarterly in advance. I am also in a position to place at your service, of course rent-free, a certain house known as Maylings, which belongs to me and is at the present time unoccupied. It is old-fashioned, but roomy and comfortable, and stands in its own plot of ground at the north-east corner of the park. Should you decide upon occupying it, I shall at once issue instructions to have it fitted up out of the spare furniture at the Chase. What say you, madam, what say you?"

It is not needful to record what Giovanna said. It was brief, but to the purpose. The baronet, who hated wordiness, although a little given to indulge in it himself on occasion, was evidently well pleased at the way she expressed herself. It was a matter of course that she should accept Maylings as her future home, although with certain unspoken reservations which, however, concerned no one but herself.

Luigi and she stayed to dinner, the hour for which at the Chase was the primitive one of five. Before leaving it was arranged that they should return on the Thursday following, Luigi to remain *en permanence*, and Giovanna to make the Chase her home till Maylings should be ready to receive her. Sir Gilbert did not fail to present her with a cheque for her first quarter's allowance. To Luigi he gave one for fifty pounds, together with a note to his tailor, in order that the young man might be enabled to furnish himself with an outfit such as became the grandson of Sir Gilbert Clare and the heir of Withington Chase. His last words as he held Luigi's hand for a moment at parting were—

"My boy, as you behave to me, so will you find that I shall behave to you."

CHAPTER XXI.

AFFAIRS AT ST. OSWYTH'S.

LEAVING Giovanna and Luigi to establish themselves in their new home and accustom themselves, so far as they may be able, to that changed condition of life to which the success of Captain Verinder's nefarious scheme has elevated them, we will hie back awhile to St. Oswyth's and ascertain how fortune has been dealing with our friends in that pleasant little town since we parted from them last.

When Mrs. Lisle, in one of her letters, informed her son that, owing to the loss of the greater part of their fortune the Miss Thursbys had been compelled to give up Vale View House and remove to an inexpensive cottage in the suburbs, she stated no more than the simple fact. Through the rascality of their agent, whose misdeeds had not been brought to light till he was beyond the reach of earthly reckoning, the sisters had lost the greater part of their property past all hope of recovery. All they had left was a somewhat fluctuating income, derivable from railway stock, which brought them in about two hundred a year. To this would be added the rental derivable from Vale View, which was their own property, as soon as a tenant should be found for it; for the present, however, it was standing empty. A matter of something over a hundred pounds had accrued to them from the sale of their surplus furniture and such other things as they no longer had a use for. More than all, they had felt the parting from Flossie, their gentle, steady-going old pony, but they had the consolation of knowing that in Mrs. Rudd it had found a mistress who would treat it with no less kindness than they had done.

It had been generally supposed among their friends and acquaintances, in view of their simple and unostentatious mode of life, that the sisters must have a few snug thousands—the result of their savings through a long course of years—put away somewhere: but such a supposition was wholly at variance with fact. In the belief that their income was as safe as the Bank of England, the sisters had never deemed it necessary to put by any portion of it, but had disbursed every shilling of whatever surplus was left in secret charity.

It was a matter of course that Tamsin should cling to them in their fallen fortunes, and accompany them to their new home. For the future she, and a young maid-servant, would be the only domestics whom they would be able to keep. But Tamsin, although heretofore her position had merely been that of maid to the sisters, had had the advantage of a sound bringing-up at home, and in days gone by had often lamented that sundry of her domestic acquirements had no scope for their exercise. Now, however, she would be able to prove both her skill as a cook and her deftness as parlourmaid, and all the housewifely gifts on which she secretly prided herself would have an oppor-

tunity of being brought into play. At length she felt that she was in her proper element.

As for the sisters, their sudden reverse of fortune was powerless to sour them or change them in any way. They remained just the same sweet and gracious ladies they had always been; and if such a thing were possible, they were beloved and respected more than ever by all who had the happiness of counting them among their friends. Their chief regret arose from the fact that they were no longer in a position to dispense their charities on the same scale as before.

The cottage to which they had removed—known as Rose Mount—made a pleasant little home, and its seven or eight rooms were amply sufficient for their changed needs. It stood on a sunny slope fronting the south, where flowers of a score different kinds—especially the one from which the cottage took its name—grew and blossomed to perfection. The thick hedge of evergreens which divided it from the high-road imparted to it that air of privacy and seclusion which the sisters loved.

With Ethel, meanwhile, affairs had by no means been at a standstill.

Day succeeded day till they had merged into weeks after Launce Keymer's sudden departure from St. Oswyth's, and still Ethel looked in vain for a letter or a message of some kind from him. She had no knowledge of his whereabouts, and however extreme her desire might be to communicate with him, she felt that only as a last resource could she prevail upon herself to ask for information from her lover's father. For one thing, she was by no means sure that Launce had broken the news of their engagement to Mr. Keymer senior. There had certainly been nothing in the note which the brewer wrote to Miss Thursby to indicate that such was the case. She was powerless to move.

Her aunts, even while in the midst of their own more personal anxieties, did not fail to sympathise with her over a state of affairs which was as much a puzzle to them as it was to her. Equally with Ethel, they felt that it was out of the question that they should ask the elder Mr. Keymer for an explanation of his son's silence, more especially now that their drop from affluence to comparative penury was a fact known to everybody. Could it be possible, they asked each other, that the fact in question had any bearing on Launce Keymer's mysterious silence? Had he merely engaged himself to Ethel in the expectation that, as her aunts' heiress, he would secure a rich wife for himself? and now, when he found his expectations dashed to the ground, was he so incredibly base as to want to break faith with her? These were questions which, although the sisters could not help putting, they shrank from any endeavour to find an answer to them. It was a hard matter at all times for them to think ill of anyone, and they recoiled especially from doing so in the present case. Not for the world would they have whispered a word

to Ethel which would have seemed to cast the faintest shadow of suspicion on her lover's truth and constancy.

As the reader will have already surmised, the news that the ladies of Vale View had undoubtedly lost the greater part of their money was not long in being conveyed to the elder Keymer by his cousin, Mr. Tuttle, clerk to Mr. Linaway the lawyer, the latter, as it may be remembered, having been employed by the sisters to draw up their wills and look after their business matters generally. To Mr. Linaway they had gone the day following the receipt of the letter which Launce Keymer had been allowed to read on that memorable evening when he was received at Vale View as Ethel's acknowledged lover.

Keymer senior had at once communicated with his son, and as they were both agreed that the affair, as between the latter and Ethel, must at once be nipped in the bud, it had been deemed advisable that Launce should stay where he was for the present. As far as was known, the sisters had not spoken of the engagement to anyone, and by-and-by he would be able to come back and brazen out the affair with impunity.

But there was one person who had by no means forgiven Launce Keymer's treachery towards her, and had made up her mind to be revenged upon him in one way or another. The person in question was Miss Hetty Blair, the pretty governess at Dulminster, whose work-box Keymer had rifled of the letters he himself had written her.

On discovering her loss Hetty had at once leaped to the very natural conclusion that her whilom lover had deserted her, and re-possessed himself of his letters in consequence of his having forsaken her for someone else. The question that at once put itself to her was, as to the means by which it would be possible to find out who that someone was. Jealousy, and a determination to be revenged on her perfidious lover, worked very powerfully within her. She was by no means the kind of young woman to sit down helplessly under so foul a wrong and content herself with bemoaning her fate and shedding an infinitude of tears. She had really loved Keymer, and the blow he had aimed at her was such as she could neither forgive nor forget, and not till she should have succeeded in returning it with interest would she rest satisfied.

Her first step, despite her mother's protests, was to quit Dulminster and take lodgings in St. Oswyth's in a back street within a stone's throw of Keymer's home. She was not long ascertaining that Launce had left the town only a couple of days after his theft of the letters, but that no one, unless it were his father, knew either where he had gone, or the business which had taken him away. Neither did all Hetty's inquiries, perseveringly as she conducted them, tend to enlighten her on the one point about which she was more anxious than any other. If Launce were engaged to any young lady at St. Oswyth's, no one there seemed to know of it. That at various times

he had flirted more or less desperately with half a score of damsels was not open to dispute ; but there matters had ended, and not even the whisper of an engagement reached Hetty from anywhere.

In such a state of affairs it was only natural that she should ask herself whether Keymer, unknown to his friends and acquaintances, might not have left home on purpose to marry someone at a distance, and might not, at that very time, be on his bridal tour. It was a tormenting thought, and one of which Hetty could by no means disabuse her mind.

Anyone less persevering or less determined to leave no stone unturned in the task she had set herself would have gone back home disheartened, and have done her utmost to forget that anyone so unspeakably mean as Launce Keymer had proved himself to be should ever have beguiled her into loving him. But Miss Hetty was made of different stuff. She knew that Keymer could not stay away for ever. It might be months, perhaps even a year, before he returned. But that he would return she felt little doubt, and should he then brin with him a wife—well, in that case, let him look to himself! Meanwhile she would stay on where she was.

It was as well for the success of her purpose that she decided to do so. Among others whose acquaintance she had succeeded in making since her arrival at St. Oswyth's was the nursery governess at Mr. Keymer's (for the brewer's youngest child by his second marriage was as yet but seven years old), who, like herself, belonged to Dulminster, a fact which Hetty put forward as a sort of bond to draw them together. The result was that they met frequently when Miss Doris Lane was out with her youthful charge, and had many confidential gossips together in which, however, Hetty's part was more that of listener than talker. Thus by degrees she learnt more about Launce and his "carryings on" than she had ever known before, and it was by no means a flattering portrait which the governess sketched for her. Still, all this in no way served to advance the object Hetty had in view, seeing that Doris, no more than others, was in a position to point to any young lady as being Launce Keymer's *fiancée*, although in their talks together Hetty recurred again and again to that particular topic.

At length Doris said one day with a touch of impatience :

"Why are you for ever asking me whether I am sure Mr. Launce is not engaged to somebody? It's enough to make one fancy that you are fishing for him yourself."

Then Hetty took a sudden resolution. From what she had seen of Doris she thought she might be trusted, and in any case the time had come when it seemed better to risk telling her secret, if by so doing anything could be gained, rather than go on from day to day in utter ignorance of that which she was burning to discover.

"It is not because I am fishing for Launce Keymer," she said, "but because till a few weeks ago he was my promised husband, and

because it ended in his treating me like the scoundrel he is, that I want to know whether he has flung me aside in order that he may engage himself to someone else."

Doris gasped and opened her eyes to their widest extent, and for a few moments could find nothing to say.

Then presently Hetty went on to tell of the loss of her letters and the means by which it had been accomplished. This sent Doris's indignation up to boiling-point, which thereupon proceeded to vent itself in certain expressions which, as referring to himself, Launce Keymer would scarcely have cared to listen to.

Miss Lane's sympathy and outspoken indignation were sweet to Hetty, who had often longed for a confidant to whom she could open her mind. "And yet now I've told her, she can help me no more than she could before," she said to herself with a sigh. But in so saying she was mistaken, as was presently to be proved.

A sudden thought seemed to strike Doris.

"How stupid I must be," she said, "not to have recollected before (though, mind you, even now I don't know that it's a matter of any consequence), that Mary Deane, the housemaid, when she was brushing and arranging some clothes which Mr. Launce had left behind him, found the photo of a young lady in one of the pockets of his overcoat. Mary dropped it in my room as she was dusting, and then told me all about it, and went and put it back where she had found it. Now do you think——"

Here Doris stopped and looked inquiringly at Hetty.

"It does not matter what I think," replied the latter, "but you will be doing me a very great service indeed if you can obtain possession of the likeness and entrust it to me for one day. The next it shall be given back to you safe and sound. Will you do this for me?"

Doris would have done more than that had more been required of her, so worked upon had her feelings been by the tale told her by the other. At their next meeting the likeness was produced and handed over to Hetty.

"It's a sweet face, don't you think?" asked Doris, as Hetty stood gazing at the photograph with bent brows.

"It's a beautiful face," she replied, "and if Launce Keymer gave me up because he had the chance of winning this girl for his wife, I can hardly wonder at it. But he need not have robbed me of my letters."

She bit her lip in an effort to keep back the tears which had sprung to her eyes.

On turning the portrait over she saw that it bore the name of a local photographer. This was so far fortunate for the purpose she had in view, although had it borne a London or even a Paris address she would have carried out her scheme in exactly the same way.

Turning to Doris she said:

"I will leave you now and meet you again in half an hour, when I will give you back the likeness."

In the course of the afternoon of next day Miss Blair knocked at the door of Rose Mount and asked to see Miss Ethel Thursby. She had experienced no difficulty in obtaining the latter's name and address from the photographer who had taken the likeness. Hetty having been shown into the tiny drawing-room by Tamsin, was presently joined by Ethel, who could not help wondering as to the nature of the business which had caused her to be sought out by a perfect stranger.

Her visitor did not leave her long in doubt.

"My name is Hetty Blair," she began, "my home is at Dulminster, and I earn my living as a daily governess. And now, Miss Thursby, will you please to pardon the question I am about to ask you, which is: Do you happen to be acquainted with a person of the name of Mr. Launce Keymer?"

On the instant a lovely flush suffused Ethel's cheeks, which was not mitigated by the fact that Miss Blair was looking at her with parted lips and eagerly anxious eyes. She felt indignant with herself at having been surprised into a display of so much emotion and perhaps a little indignant with her questioner. She had not failed to notice that Miss Blair employed the word "person" in her mention of Keymer.

"The gentleman you speak of is my friend," she replied with a touch of hauteur, "although I am at a loss to know in what way that fact concerns you, or why——"

"I have presumed to come here and question you about him. That you will learn presently. Mr. Launce Keymer being, as you say, your friend, did he ever take you so far into his confidence as to tell you that he had engaged himself by a solemn promise to marry someone else?"

The colour vanished from Ethel's face, leaving it of a deathlike pallor. There was a little space of silence which to both the girls was fraught with pain. Then Ethel said faintly:

"No, Mr. Keymer never told me that."

"I thought not," answered Hetty, quietly. "Miss Thursby, I am the someone—I, humble Hetty Blair, nursery governess, whom Launce Keymer promised to make his wife."

"I cannot believe it," came from Ethel, but her words lacked the accent of conviction.

"It *is* hard to believe, is it not, that any man should be such a villain? But, for all that, it's the simple truth, as I can prove in a way which even you will find it impossible to dispute. If you will allow me, I will sit down, for the truth is I shake like an aspen."

"Pray pardon my forgetfulness," said Ethel, and with that she seated herself on a sofa a little distance away.

"I think he must have been fond of me at one time, or he would never have written me the letters he did," resumed Hetty presently. Ethel's eyes were fixed intently on her. She sat leaning a little

forward, her hands with tightly interlocked fingers resting on her lap. At the word "letters" she could not repress a start.

"Though I began to suspect latterly," continued Hetty, "that he was no longer quite as fond of me as he used to be, I did not doubt his love, and, least of all, did I think he would behave to me as only a scoundrel could behave. I had a number of letters from him at different times—eight in all. He used to go over to Dulminster twice a week to see me. He knew where I kept the letters—in a little work-box which stood on the sideboard in my mother's parlour where we used to sit together. Well, one afternoon, when he knew I was from home, he came to the house, and having sent my mother out on an errand, while she was gone, he broke open my work-box and stole my letters—that is to say, his letters to me; and from that day to this I have never set eyes on him, nor heard from him in any way. And the man who did that was Mr. Launce Keymer."

Ethel sat as one bereft of speech. It was as if the tides of her physical life had been arrested in full flow and sent surging back to overwhelm heart and brain alike, only to be released a few moments later and let go madly on their way. As yet but one coherent thought could frame itself in her mind: "And this is the man whose promised wife I am!"

Then she became conscious that Hetty was speaking again.

"I told you just now, Miss Thursby, that I had eight letters in all from him, but there were only six in the work-box when he rifled it. The remaining two were in a drawer in my bedroom. I have brought them with me to-day for you to read if you would like to do so."

"Not for worlds!" gasped Ethel.

"You are quite welcome to do so. You would then see for yourself how he used to write of me as his 'darling Hetty,' and his 'sweet little wife that is to be.' What wretches some men are, to be sure!"

Ethel found herself automatically counting her heart beats—"one, two—one, two—one, two." She was faint and dizzy.

Hetty was regarding her with eyes that were blurred with tears.

After a little, Ethel's dizziness passed. Bending her gaze on Hetty, she said:

"But what induced you to seek *me* out—that is to say, me rather than anyone else—and tell me all this about Mr. Keymer?"

"It was because I found out by accident that he was in the habit of carrying your likeness about with him, and I knew he was not the kind of man to do that unless——"

Ethel held up her hand. "That is enough," she said softly.

(*To be continued.*)

LAW AND LAUGHTER.

By the Author of "How to be Happy Though Married."

PERHAPS it is because law seems rather alien to laughter, and a law court the last place where one expects to be merry, that a joke goes so far with, and is made so much of by, all who are connected with the legal profession. With the assistance of 'A Book About Lawyers' and other sources of information we shall give a few specimens of legal mirth arranged under three heads: first, the smart sayings of lawyers to each other; secondly, those of barristers and judges to witnesses and juries; and thirdly, the quite as good answers which these gentlemen have sometimes received.

Sir Nicholas Bacon, who was chancellor in the reign of Elizabeth, seems to have fully agreed with Lord Lyndhurst, that one of the chief duties of a judge is to render it disagreeable to counsel to talk nonsense. Once a loquacious barrister was checked in a course of pert talkativeness by this remark from the stammering Lord Keeper: "There is a difference between you and me—for me it is a pain to s—speak, for you a pain to hold your tongue."

Another Elizabethan chancellor who was sprightly on the bench was Hatton. In a case concerning the limits of certain land, the counsel on one side having remarked with explanatory emphasis, "We lie on this side, my lord;" and the counsel on the other side having interposed with equal vehemence, "We lie on this side, my lord"—the Lord Chancellor leaned backwards and dryly observed, "If you lie on both sides, whom am I to believe?"

The following amiable contest occurred in Westminster Hall between Lord Campbell and an eminent Queen's Counsel. The action was one brought to recover for damages done to a carriage which the Q.C. repeatedly called a broug-ham, pronouncing both syllables of the word *brougham*. Whereupon Lord Campbell pompously observed, "*Broom* is the more usual pronunciation; a carriage of the kind you mean is generally and not incorrectly called a *broom*—that pronunciation is open to no grave objection, and it has the great advantage of saving the time consumed by uttering an extra syllable." Half an hour later in the same trial Lord Campbell alluding to a decision given in a similar action, said, "In that the carriage which had sustained injury was an omnibus——" "Pardon me, my lord," interposed the Q.C., "a carriage of the kind to which you draw attention is usually termed a 'bus;' that pronunciation is open to no great objection, and it has the great advantage of saving the time consumed by uttering two extra syllables."

The interruption was followed by a roar of laughter, in which Lord Campbell joined more heartily than anyone else.

Lord Ellenborough has the credit or discredit of having ruined a young man by an outburst of satiric humour. "The *unfortunate* client for whom it is my privilege to appear," said a young barrister, making his first essay in Westminster Hall—"the unfortunate client, my lord, for whom I appear—hem! hem!—I say, my lord, my *unfortunate client*——" Leaning forwards, and speaking in a soft, cooing voice, that was all the more derisive, because it was so gentle, Lord Ellenborough said, "You may go on, sir—so far the court is with you."

This judge was famous for sarcastic speeches to counsel who consumed his time to no purpose. Mr. Preston was a great conveyancer but not a brilliant advocate. On one occasion having inflicted on the court an unspeakably dry oration, towards the close of the day he asked when it would be their lordships' pleasure to hear the remainder of his argument. Lord Ellenborough uttered a sigh of resignation, and answered, "We are bound to hear you, and we will endeavour to give you our undivided attention on Friday next; but as for *pleasure*, that, sir, has been long out of the question."

When in a trial about limestone quarries a barrister called Caldecott had said over and over again with dull verbosity that they "were not rateable, because the limestone could only be reached by boring, which was a matter of science," Ellenborough gravely inquired, "Would you, Mr. Caldecott, have us believe that every kind of *boring* is matter of science?" With finer humour he nipped in the bud one of Randle Jackson's flowery harangues. "My lords," said the orator, with nervous intonation, "in the book of nature it is written——" "Be kind enough, Mr. Jackson," interposed Lord Ellenborough, "to mention the page from which you are about to quote."

After these illustrations of ferocious humour, it is refreshing to read of an act of kindness done by one who could be witty, but who would not sacrifice humanity to wit or ruin a young man's prospects rather than give up a joke. Seeing a young barrister overpowered with nervousness, Mr. Justice Talfourd gave him time to recover himself by saying in the kindest possible manner: "Excuse me for interrupting you, but for a minute I am not at liberty to pay you attention." Whereupon the judge wrote a note to a friend. Before the note was finished the barrister had completely recovered his self-possession.

One of the best "legal" puns was made by Lord Chelmsford when he was Sir Frederick Thesiger. He had objected to a learned serjeant who, in examining witnesses in a case in which he was engaged put leading questions. "I have a right," maintained the serjeant, doggedly, "to deal with my witnesses as I please." "To that I offer no objection," retorted Sir Frederick; "you may *deal* as you like, but you shan't *lead*."

Baron Alderson was an excellent classical scholar, so it made him

shudder when a barrister applied in his court for a "nolle prosēqui." "Consider, sir," he said, "that this is the last day of term, and don't make things unnecessarily long."

It was this judge who, in reply to the juryman's confession that he was deaf in one ear, observed, "Then leave the box before the trial begins, for it is necessary that jurymen should *hear both sides.*"

Lord Ellenborough used to amuse everyone except the witnesses to whom he addressed his sarcastic sayings. To a surgeon who said in the witness-box, "I employ myself as a surgeon," he retorted, "But does anybody else employ you as a surgeon?" The demand to be examined on affirmation being preferred by a Quaker witness, whose dress was so much like the costume of an ordinary *conformist* that the officer of the court had begun to administer the usual oath, his lordship inquired of the "friend," "Do you really mean to impose upon the court by appearing here in the disguise of a reasonable being?"

This about the dress of a witness reminds me of a story I have read somewhere in reference to another judge. A bricklayer came into the witness-box to give evidence in his shirt-sleeves. "Really, witness," said the judge, "you ought to have made yourself more respectable-looking before coming into court. You might at least have put on a coat." "My lord," was the ready answer, "if it comes to that, I am just as properly dressed as yourself. You come into court with gown and wig, which are your working clothes, and I have come in mine."

A witness eighty years old having given his evidence with remarkable clearness, Lord Mansfield examined him as to his habitual mode of living, and found that he had throughout life been an early riser and a singularly temperate man. "Ay," observed the Chief Justice, in a tone of approval, "I have always found that without temperance and early habits, longevity is never attained." The next witness, the *elder* brother of this model of temperance, was then called, and he almost surpassed his brother as an intelligent and clear-headed utterer of evidence. "I suppose," observed Lord Mansfield, "that you also are an early riser?" "No, my lord," answered the veteran stoutly: "I like my bed at all hours, and special-*lie* I like it of a morning." "Ah, but like your brother, you are a very temperate man?" quickly asked the judge, looking out anxiously for the safety of the more important part of his theory. "My lord," responded this ancient Elm, disdaining to plead guilty to a charge of habitual sobriety, "I am a very old man, and my memory is as clear as a bell, but I can't remember the night when I have gone to bed without having been more or less drunk." Lord Mansfield was silent. "Ah, my lord," the leading counsel exclaimed, "this old man's case supports a theory upheld by many persons, that habitual intemperance is favourable to longevity." "No, no," replied the Chief Justice with a smile, "this old man and his brother merely teach us what every carpenter knows—that Elm, whether it be wet or dry, is a very tough wood."

On more than one occasion the infamous Jeffreys, when attempting to brow-beat witnesses, met his match. "You fellow in the leathern doublet," he is said to have exclaimed to a countryman whom he was about to cross-examine, "pray, what are you paid for swearing?" "God bless you, sir, and make you an honest man," answered the farmer, looking the barrister full in the face, and speaking with a voice of hearty good-humour; "if you had no more for lying than I have for swearing, you would wear a leather doublet as well as I."

No barrister was more successful in his treatment of witnesses than Erskine, but he could not convince the fanatic who, objecting to kiss the book in the usual way, stated that he would hold up his hand and swear. Erskine asked him to give his reasons for preferring so eccentric a way to the ordinary mode of giving testimony. "It is written in the book of Revelations," answered the man, "that the angel standing on the sea *held up his hand.*" "But that does not apply to your case," urged the advocate; "for in the first place, you are no angel; secondly, you cannot tell how the angel would have sworn if he had stood on dry ground, as you do." This was exactly the reply which the gravest divine would have made to such scruples, but it did not alter the opinion of the witness, and he was permitted to give evidence in his own peculiar way.

Amongst droll anecdotes concerning witnesses may be placed those which exemplify the difficulty which a judge often experiences in understanding the nautical technicalities of sea-faring, and the provincialisms of provincial witnesses. Lord Mansfield was presiding at a trial consequent upon a collision of two ships at sea, when a sailor, whilst giving testimony, said, "At the time I was standing abaft the binnacle," whereupon his Lordship, with a proper desire to master the facts of the case, observed, "Stay, stay a minute, witness; you say that at the time in question you were *standing abaft the binnacle.* Now tell me what is abaft the binnacle?" This was too much for the gravity of "the salt," who immediately before climbing into the witness-box had taken a copious draught of neat rum. Removing his eyes from the bench, and turning round upon the crowded court with an expression of intense amusement, he exclaimed at the top of his voice, "He's a pretty fellow for a judge! Bless my jolly old eyes! You have got a pretty sort of a landlubber for a judge! He wants me to tell him where *abaft the binnacle* is!" Not less amused than the witness, Lord Mansfield rejoined, "Well, my friend, you must fit me for my office by telling me where *abaft the binnacle* is. You've already shown me the meaning of *half seas over!*"

The following story exemplifies the difficulty that arises when witnesses use provincial terms with which the judge is not familiar. Giving evidence in Newcastle Courthouse a witness said—"As I was going along the quay, I saw a hubbleshew coming out of a chare-foot." Not aware that on Tyne-side "hubbleshew" meant "a concourse of riotous persons;" that the narrow alleys or lanes of

Newcastle "old town" were called by the inhabitants "chares;" and that the lower end of each alley, where it opened upon quay-side, was termed a "chare-foot;" the judge, seeing only one part of the puzzle, inquired the meaning of the word "hubbleshew." "A crowd of disorderly persons," answered the witness. "And you mean to say," inquired the judge of assize, with a voice and look of surprise, "that you saw a crowd of people come out of a chare-foot?" "I do, my lord," replied the witness. "Gentlemen," said his lordship turning to the jury, "it must be needless for me to inform you *that this witness is insane!*"

In the same town there was a trial towards the close of the last century, the report of which gives the following succession of questions and answers:—*Barrister.*—"What is your name?" *Witness.*—"Adam, sir—Adam Thompson." *Barrister.*—"Where do you live?" *Witness.*—"In Paradise." *Barrister* (with facetious tone)—"And pray, Mr. Adam, how long have you dwelt in Paradise?" *Witness.*—"Ever since the flood." Paradise is the name of a village in the immediate vicinity of Newcastle, and "the flood" referred to by the witness was the inundation (memorable in local annals) of the Tyne, which, in the year 1771, swept away the old Tyne Bridge.

A REVELATION.

"We live in the midst of revelations. . . . There is hardly ever a complete silence in our souls. God is whispering to us well-nigh incessantly . . . only we do not always hear, because of the noise, hurry, and distraction which life causes as it rushes on."—F. W. FABER.

HE took his manuals in his hand,
He spent long moments on his knees,
Yet could not find the heavenly doors
To which he thought them keys.

They told him how he ought to pray,
Aye, even how to stand and kneel,
They put strange words upon his lips,
Suggested things he ought to feel.

They prompted all his acts of praise,
They fenced about his ways and looks,
They bade him love on certain lines,
And think his thoughts from certain books.

The hungry longings of his heart,
  Its vague desires for inward rest,
Its feeble strivings after God,
  He found not anywhere expressed.

"Oh, Lord," he cried, "I seek in vain,
  I knock and ask, yet find not Thee—
I am shut in upon myself,
  And with myself is misery!"

With heavy heart he closed his books,
  And heavy-hearted still knelt on,
'Till suddenly he raised his eyes
  To where the eastern window shone.

Through blazoned panes the sunlight came
  And touched with glory nave and choir,
And lay upon the chancel steps
  In pools of many-coloured fire.

And lifted high upon the glass,
  The likeness of the Son of God,
Whose arms uphold the fallen world,
  Smiled down upon him from the rood.

Then all the meaning of that Face—
  More than the artist's skill might dare—
Seemed suddenly to dawn and glow
  And pierce the clouds of his despair.

The shadow lifted from his heart
  And left it glad, he scarce knew why,
He almost feared to breathe or move
  Because that God was very nigh.

The hunger of his soul was stayed,
  He was not any more alone;
But felt the beating heart of love
  As one that understood his own.

Then knew he that our stammering tongues
  That listening Ear can ne'er offend;
But that He bids us speak with Him
  As "a man speaketh with his friend."

Thus, when all human helpers fail,
  God worketh His more perfect plan—
Swift through some heavenly window flames
  The glory of the Son of Man.

CHRISTIAN BURKE.

PAMELA'S NOVEL.

IT was known that Pamela wrote, though what she wrote was a mystery excepting to her family and the intimate family friend, Leonard Venn. It was no secret that she used her pen, and that she used it to good effect; everybody was aware that she sent away packets of MSS. every week by the post, and that in return she received quite big cheques. It was dimly supposed that she wrote for papers, and some of her friends believed, and stated almost positively, that she was on the staff of the *Times* or of the *Saturday Review*, or perhaps of both; only her brothers and sisters and Leonard Venn knew the facts of the case, and they were quite willing to aid her in her wish for privacy.

"Oh, yes, she writes a great deal, she is very clever," they would say when curious people interrogated them. "The *Times* leaders, did you ask? Well, I don't feel at liberty to answer that question. The press is anonymous you know."

The little band who were in the secret often laughed at the speculations of the public.

"Why, I believe they think you write the Archbishop's sermons!" Minnie said one day.

"And what do you think young Tiptop said to me last night at the Lyceum? I've been dying to tell you all day," cried Amy. "He said as seriously as possible, 'Now, Miss Worthington, tell me truly, *didn't* your sister write this play?' It was 'Much Ado about Nothing.'"

They all laughed.

"What terrible idiots most people are!" remarked Pamela.

"Well, for my part, I like to keep up the illusion," said Charlie. "I like it supposed that public opinion is formed in this house. The fellows in my office think you have the ear of both Houses of Parliament, Pamela. Each one, according to his views, is cocksure that you do all the best things in the *Daily News* or the *Morning Post*."

"There's nothing like a little mystery," observed Edwin. "It's part of Pamela's cleverness that she saw that. She's the best man among us, and no mistake."

"Certainly, there's no one to be compared to her," said Leonard, who was the eldest of the little party.

"You all make me blush!" cried Pamela. "After all, it's nothing I do. If I only had time to write something really good! If only I had the opportunity to write a novel that should make all the world hold its breath, then you might talk!" said she.

But Pamela's work was regular, and the opportunity did not come.

The uneventful happy years slipped by, and people went on believing Pamela was some great one, and Pamela herself was happy enough, though she was often restless and chafed at her circumstances. She did not show her discontent to her brothers and sisters, who entertained their friends and went to the theatres, and did many a delightful thing out of Pamela's cheques, but she very often lamented her hard fate to Leonard.

"There are so many thoughts in my mind, and such a fine plot, and characters—Oh, characters that have never been dreamt of before! she exclaimed with enthusiasm. "If I only had time! If I only had a clear two months and could go away into the country by myself! I could do it in two months."

"Well, why don't you take two months' holiday?" Leonard asked.

"Impossible! I should fall out. There are a dozen women anxious to take my place, and quite as capable."

"But if you wrote a novel that electrified the world, you wouldn't want to do this sort of work any longer."

"Not if it caught on. But supposing it didn't catch on, Leonard? good things, the best things, are often not appreciated at first."

"Still I think I should try. Get someone to do your work for you for a couple of months and see what you can do. It isn't as if you worked for your bread and butter."

"Nay, but I work for something we should miss much more. I provide all the elegancies of our lives, all our innocent pleasures and gaieties. Life would be very dull to all the younger ones without me and my cheques. Who would take them to plays and concerts. Who would give Minnie and Amy their extra *chiffons*? Who would help Charlie and Edwin when they are hard up, and boys are always hard up? I couldn't bear to mortify them. And yet," said Pamela, "when I think of my paltry, ignoble business that people call *writing* —ugh! sometimes I can hardly bear it."

"Nothing is paltry and ignoble that is done well and with a good purpose," said Leonard.

"It is like you, Leonard, to say a kind thing. But I sometimes wish I had never begun this kind of work at all. I ought to have sought higher in the first instance; I ought never to have condescended to this sort of thing."

"Perhaps, Pamela, if you had attempted a higher flight you would have met with humiliation and disaster. We can't all fly like the eagle. In the course of my thirty years I have noticed that everyone generally gravitates towards what he can do best."

"Ah, Leonard, you have never believed in me!" cried Pamela with passionate bitterness. "You believe in my capacity to earn money, not in my ability to get fame, to make a name, to create a reputation. You are a man, and I suppose you would hate it if I became celebrated, if people pointed at me in the streets and said, 'There is the greatest authoress since George Eliot?' Why should you be so ungenerous?"

"My dear Pamela, it is I who was imploring you to take a holiday and write your novel, and when you said the holiday was out of the question, I tried to console you. You are unjust, Pamela," said Leonard.

"Oh, I know I oughtn't to be impatient," said Pamela, beginning to cry a little. "But sometimes I feel so small and cooped-up. I wish I had been born without a spark of ambition. What is the good of ambition to a person who only does my work?"

"Believe me, Pamela, without ambition you wouldn't even be doing your work. You would be contented to do nothing like Minnie and Amy. Besides, your work is very good work and nothing to be ashamed of. I wish I thought I had influenced as many of my fellow-creatures for good as you have. Think," said Leonard, smiling, "how many young ladies you have stopped in a mad career of tight-lacing and rouging."

"Yes, that is all very nice," said Pamela, mournfully. "But the long and short of it is that, wrap myself in mystery as I may, I am not a writer at all. I am a mere hack—a mere hack," she repeated.

When Pamela was in this mood it was not very easy to comfort her, but fortunately for poor Leonard, who loved her dearly and was not yet in a position to marry, it did not occur very often. Pamela's ambition frequently slept for months at a time, and then she was gay and contented and the very life of the little house at Chelsea, where she dwelt with her sisters and brothers. During these periods she was quite satisfied that she was able to earn plenty of money, and the mystery in which she was enveloped sufficiently pleased her *amour-propre*.

"It is so comic," she would say. "I like posing as a very great and learned person, when in reality I am only an authority on frocks and cosmetics."

For that was Pamela's secret. She did not write leading articles, nor the reviews of books, nor essays, nor stories; but she wrote all the dress articles for the *Duchess of Fife Weekly*, and monthly fashion letters for the *Rotten Row Review*, and she was the "Rosebud" of *Edith's Magazine*, and the "Fernseed" of *Mrs. Grundy's Gossip*, and the "May-Blossom" of *Tuesday's Toilette*, and wrote columns of "Answers to Correspondents" in these three weekly papers, giving advice as to the re-modelling of old dresses, and what is the best dentifrice, and where to get a *trousseau* for Natal, and why the adult female waist cannot be compressed into sixteen inches, and a host of other matters of equal and similar importance. It was laborious work, because it took up a long time, but it was easy too, because Pamela was accustomed to it, and had been doing it ever since she was nineteen, and probably there was no young woman in London who knew more than she did about dress in all its branches and hair-washes and manicure, and in a wholesome way preserving the complexion and improving the figure. Pamela was strong and healthy, and therefore this continuous work (for she carried it with her even to the seaside) had not told upon her,

and as Leonard had said, she had the pride and pleasure of knowing that she had influenced for good many a girl among her correspondents; but every now and then, as we have seen, her ambition stirred, the splendid novel that she dreamed of seemed to spring forward, clamouring to be written, and all her work on the fashions and the toilet requisites palled upon her and became flat, stale, and unprofitable.

When Pamela, however, was twenty-seven, a new thing came into her life.

She was sitting alone on one of those fine afternoons in early spring when it seems a joy merely to be alive, and yet when the joy of life is almost a burden and the limbs are languid and the body demands repose. Pamela had just despatched her weekly budget to the *Tuesday Toilette*, and now she was sitting in her pretty drawing-room, nicely dressed, drinking tea. Her brothers and sisters had gone to a *matinée* at the Globe Theatre. The tickets were her present to them, and the fifth ticket, which she had purchased for herself, she had presented the previous evening to one of Charlie's friends, who, she thought, admired Minnie. Everyone had cried out against this, but Pamela had insisted.

"I'm always busy till four o'clock on Saturday, unless I sit up very late on Friday night," she had declared. "Minnie, you know it's the case. Please take it, Mr. Wilson."

So Mr. Wilson took it, and the theatre-party had set forth, leaving Pamela to plod through her correspondence. And on this occasion it was truly plodding, for one of her discontented fits had come on, and her correspondents seemed to be silly little dolts, and the whole affair appeared stupid and tedious.

"A mere drudge—not even a literary hack," she was saying to herself. "Why have I never had a moment to write my novel? O if I only could!"

But how could she take a holiday, when perhaps Minnie would be married in the summer, and she would want all the money she could get in order that her younger sister might have a beautiful *trousseau*.

"Otherwise I really would get Mrs. Abdy to do my work for a few weeks and I'd go away into the country," she thought. "Mrs. Abdy has done such work, but she's given it up since she married, and she wouldn't want to get it from me."

Then Leonard Venn came in, and it was he who brought the new thing into her life. He looked very eager, as he took her hand, and she remarked upon his unwonted demeanour, for he was generally quiet and grave.

"What has happened? You look quite excited," she cried.

"I am rather excited," he replied. "They are going to take me into partnership. My prospects are suddenly bettered a thousandfold. I can do at once things I had expected to wait and wait for. I can take a house. I can marry."

"Yes!" said Pamela. She did not blush or cast down her eyes. For years she had been so absorbed in her work and her ambitions that she had never guessed, what was patent to everyone else, that Leonard was in love with her. But in a moment, while she looked up innocently into his glowing face, the new thing was thrown at her feet in the shape of an honest, manly declaration of love, and an offer of marriage.

Pamela put up her hands as if to shield herself from some danger. "Oh no, no!" she cried. "How could you think of such a thing? Why did you say this? Why did you disturb our nice, happy friendship? Oh no, no!" she repeated.

Leonard was terribly disappointed. But he kept his temper and his head. "Why should I not have thought of such a thing?" he asked. "I have loved you for many years, Pamela. Why should I not seek you for my wife? Am I too presumptuous?"

"No, no, Leonard! Forgive me if I seemed uncourteous. Presumptuous! How could *you* presume? But I am so surprised. I never thought of such a thing."

"Couldn't you try and get used to the thought of it?"

She shook her head.

"No, Leonard, no! I haven't thought much about marrying, but when I have thought of it, I have always pictured to myself being wooed by some king-like stranger, someone who fell in love with me at first sight and believed in my powers—not an old friend whom I knew when he was a schoolboy, and who knows all the ins and outs of my tempers and my waywardnesses and all about my stupid writings and my dreary work——"

"And all your generosity and unselfishness and loving ways, and all your pluck and perseverance, and unwearying zeal," interrupted the lover.

"Leonard, you make me ashamed of myself. You love me, but I want to be admired and believed in. You don't believe in my talents a little bit," said Pamela, with emphasis. "You don't think I could write a fine novel. You think I am only good to describe the fashions."

"If you will be my wife, dear, you shall have all the leisure you desire. There will be no need for you to describe the fashions then. You shall sit at peace and write your novel."

"Ah, you say that to tempt me. You want to cajole me, but in your heart you don't believe my novel would be worth reading. You know you don't."

"You have no right to say that, dear Pamela. At present, all you say you want is the opportunity, and I promise that you shall have the opportunity."

"But you don't believe I can write a good novel?"

He remained silent.

"Speak, Leonard! Do you believe that I could write a really fine novel?"

"Pamela, you push me very hard, but if I deceive you now, you will never believe me in anything. Dearest, I believe you are the best and sweetest woman in the world, and to me you are the loveliest and the most lovable, but I do not imagine that you have the gifts to produce a great novel."

"I knew it," said Pamela. "I am not angry with you, Leonard. You can't help your opinions; besides, I have always known them. But don't you see that it would be impossible for me to marry you? I should be miserable if my husband only respected my virtues and thought little of my mind."

So the colloquy ended. But when Leonard had gone, Pamela cried violently, and when the theatre-party returned, she had gone to bed with a headache.

* * * * *

Leonard Venn did not come very often to the little house at Chelsea during the ensuing months; but in the excitement of Minnie's engagement to Mr. Wilson and the preparations for her marriage, the infrequency of his visits was not much remarked upon. A wedding was a new thing in the Worthington family, and even Charlie and Edwin, though they pretended to make a mock of it, thought and talked of little else. The bride-elect was radiant, and Amy was full of smiles and happiness. That Pamela was a little grave was easily explained. She was the eldest, she reminded the others, and her sisters and brothers had been confided to her charge by their dear mother, and she naturally felt a certain responsibility in sending one of them out into the world. They believed her; but this statement was not altogether true, as Pamela knew very well in her heart.

She scarcely knew if she regretted having refused Leonard, but she did know that she missed his society extremely, and that, in all the little questions which arose respecting the marriage, she would have given much to be able to consult him. To have lost his friendship was like losing a high wall that kept off the north wind. Till it was a thing of the past, she had not guessed how precious it was to her, nor how necessary. She told herself constantly that she did not love him, and that she could never, never be happy with a man who did not perceive and acknowledge her mental gifts. Nevertheless, she felt very lonely without him, and she began to wonder how she could support her routine-work in the years to come, if she could no longer, as of old, pour out her jeremiads into his kind ear.

She chafed under the idea that he held her capacity cheap, and her vague ambition gathered strength as she pondered what he had said: "But he shall not despise me," she said to herself, employing a term that he had never used. "I *will* write my novel, and he shall see what I can do."

The notion gained ground, and by the time July came it was known that, as soon as Minnie was married, Pamela meant to carry out her long-talked-of project and retire alone into the country to

write a novel undisturbed. Leonard, however, only heard of it on the wedding-day. Edwin was his informant, and it was not till late in the afternoon, when the bride and bridegroom had departed and the guests were taking their leave, that he managed to approach the mistress of the house. He thought she looked very pretty in her mauve dress and bonnet (she had chosen mauve, as an elder-sisterly colour, she had told her friends), but he thought also that she looked tired and perhaps rather sad.

"Good-bye, Pamela," he said. "I congratulate you. It has been a very pretty wedding."

"Minnie looked very sweet, didn't she?" said the sister, with some pride.

"Very. I hear you are going out of town immediately?"

"Yes. On Saturday. All by myself into a completely country place, nine miles from a station." She spoke with elation, and her eyes were very bright.

"You won't be dull?" he said.

"Oh no! I shall be far too busy."

"Are you going to write the novel?"

"Yes, Leonard. At last!"

He stood looking down at her eager face, with trouble in his eyes.

"I shall give myself up to it," she went on, speaking rapidly and with excitement. "It is all in my mind, and I feel that it will flow from my pen. I shall do nothing else. Mrs. Abdy is taking all my work for eight weeks, but in eight weeks it will be done. Then, Leonard, you will see?"

"I hope I shall *read*," said he. "Well, I wish you all success. I hope you will be very happy and attain your heart's desire."

"Thank you. I am sure I shall be very happy. I feel that I shall revel in congenial work. And you, Leonard," she added, "are you doing well?"

"I am doing as well as a man can do who has been foiled in the longing of his life," he returned quietly.

Then he held her hand for an instant and was gone, and Pamela's eyes filled with tears.

"But soon I shall have accomplished my great work, and he will see, he will know," she thought to herself. "Then, when he acknowledges my powers—then if he asks me again—why, then——"

She did not finish her joyful thought in words; but it is certain that when she journeyed to her country solitude on the following Saturday she was thinking more of the delight of convincing Leonard Venn that she was a great novelist, than of electrifying the entire world.

* * * * *

Pamela had taken lodgings in a gamekeeper's cottage on the estate of a great nobleman, who had so many fine places that he could only visit each of them once in about six years. This year Fulcroft Manor

was empty, but this pleased Pamela, who wanted to be quite alone, and she set to work immediately and began to write 'The Story of Clanrickarde.' The story, as she had surmised, flowed from her pen. She wrote easily, fluently, not pausing for a word or an idea. Plot, character, dialogue, all arranged themselves in her mind as she went along; the book wrote itself, as she had heard that the books of great authors always did. Pamela sat writing in her sunny little parlour, with the door open to the sounds and scents of the rustic homestead and the old-fashioned garden, from early morn till an hour or so past noon. Then her simple dinner was served, after which she would wander forth among the woods and lanes and fields, thinking always of 'Clanrickarde,' her mind absorbed with him and the fame he was to bring her. The only other thought that possessed her was that of Leonard, and this was a thought of triumph, for she already, in anticipation, saw herself the first novelist of the day, and her old friend and lover yielding homage to her genius. It was a delightful time, the most delightful that Pamela had ever known.

One day, however, Pamela's solitude was interrupted by an adventure. Her landlady had told her that Mr. Cunningham Burgess, his lordship's cousin, had come down to the Manor.

"He's a hart-cricket, ma'am," the good woman explained, "an' he says he likes to come down for a bit o' rest after the London season."

Pamela did not come across him for several days, but at last one evening, when in climbing over a fence, she slipped and rolled to the bottom of a deep ditch. He started up as if he had been lying in wait for the accident, and rendered her his assistance. It was a common little adventure, such as must happen many times every year; but the lady who falls is not always daintily-attired and very pretty, and the gentleman who lends his aid is not invariably young and handsome and dressed in brown velveteen, and a red tie and soft felt hat. Pamela took in all these details at a glance, but at the moment she merely expressed her thanks warmly and went on her way. But the "hart-cricket," who was already tired of his rest at Fulcroft Manor, determined that the incident should not end there, and he made it his business to meet Pamela the next day.

"I hope you don't feel any ill-effects from your fall yesterday," he said, stopping in the middle of the woodland walk where he met her, and taking off his hat.

"Oh, no, thank you," Pamela returned, graciously. "The nettles stung me rather, but that was all the harm I received."

"Ah, but nettle-stings are very painful," said he.

"But they soon pass," said she, laughing.

"How did you treat them?" he asked, solicitously. "May I turn and walk beside you for a few minutes?"

Thus originated the acquaintance that quickly ripened into an intimacy. Pamela was conscious that she was committing an

unconventionality; but one does many things on a holiday that could not be done at home, and now that 'The Story of Clanrickarde' was nearly finished she began to feel a certain hunger for society. Besides, the companionship of Mr. Cunningham Burgess was stimulating, and she was pleased to know personally a man whose writing she had known for some years. So she permitted him to join her in her walks every afternoon, and the art-critic quickly initiated an intellectual flirtation which diverted him and somewhat intoxicated Pamela. Not that she was in love with her new friend; but his whole conversation tended to feed her ambition and filled her with desires, and aspirations, and hopes that had hitherto remained latent in her soul. She never told him, however, that she was at the foot of the journalistic ladder, to the top of which he had climbed, and he never guessed that the mysterious business which she told him had brought her to Fulcroft was the writing of a novel.

Truth to tell, Mr. Cunningham Burgess talked better than he listened, and he had so much to say about his own opinions that he scarcely noticed how little he gleaned of Pamela's ideas.

"Art," he would say, lying handsome and sunburnt in the yellowing bracken beside the fallen tree-trunk on which Pamela was seated, "art is the *summum bonum* of the life of the best men and women. Not realism, which is mere imitation, puerile and tedious, like the urchins crying, 'Cuckoo! Cuckoo!' in the spring, nor yet idealism, which is mere ignorant imagining, like the superstitious man's belief in ghosts, but *Poetism*, the blending of the actual with the possible, the union of that which is with that which could be, the combination of sight with insight."

Such talk greatly excited Pamela, and her heart beat high with hope and longing. If only, she thought, she could show her MS. to Mr. Cunningham Burgess! If she could but get his opinion! If she could draw from him the verdict that 'The Story of Clanrickarde' was, as she believed it to be, the essence of *Poetism*, blending the actual with the possible, uniting that which is with that which could be, combining sight with insight! Yet she shrank from requesting him to read her novel, and she knew not why. Perhaps because Leonard Venn's *dictum* on her capabilities still rung in her ears.

But September was hastening to its close, and in a few days Pamela's holiday would be over. One noon she wrote the last word of 'The Story of Clanrickarde,' and for hours afterwards she sat reading it, fascinated by her own work. She rose up at last, tired but triumphant. For it was very good—it would make her reputation—it would place her on the pinnacle of fame—it would rank her with the best. Feverishly, she drank the tea that had been brought to her and forgotten, then put on her hat and went out. She went straight to the fallen tree among the ferns, where she and the art critic most frequently ended their rambles. A little still pool lay there, and to-day it looked dark and deep, for it was past six and the sun had

set. Mr. Cunningham Burgess was there. He flung away his cigar and came to meet her.

"Why have you tarried so long?" he said reproachfully. "I have been expecting you for hours."

"I have been very much occupied," she faltered. Even now, she dared not say, "I have finished my book—I have done my great work."

"You look dreadfully tired and overdone," he said, making her sit down. "What was your occupation? That is, may I ask? May I know."

Then an artifice suddenly darted into her mind.

"You may know, and you may help me, if you will," she said, timidly.

"If I will? What is there I would not do for you?" he returned.

"But this is asking a good deal. It is taking up your time. It is to read the MS. of a novel."

"Oh!" said he, making a comical face. "But of course I will do it. Tell me about it. Who has written it?"

"Someone," said Pamela, tremulously, "whom I know very well, has written a novel. I have been reading it all the afternoon. If you are so very kind, I should like your opinion of it."

"Certainly you shall have it. But is the thing good. Is it worth anything?"

"It impressed me very much. Of course I am not a critic, but——"

"But you think favourably of it?"

She nodded.

"Then I daresay I shall do the same. If I may, I will walk back with you now and fetch it. It is getting too late and dark for you to be out. When will you meet me to-morrow? Then I can give my verdict."

"I will meet you here at three o'clock," said Pamela.

She was tingling with anxiety, she was on thorns with expectation. When she saw Mr. Cunningham Burgess go away with 'The Story of Clanrickarde' under his arm, she felt faint with agonising apprehension. What if he thought ill of it? But he could not—he could not! She went out into the garden where the asters and geraniums looked white in the starlight, and sat down on a bench among the hollyhocks and looked up into the arch of heaven, and recalled to mind passionately how good—how very good—her novel was. It would win the world. The great critic would bow down before it.

"I have done a great thing," she said to herself, going up the narrow stairs to her bedroom.

All night she lay awake, mentally following Mr. Cunningham Burgess's reading of the wonderful book. Every chapter lay before her. Almost every page stood before her mental vision. As she reached the best bits, the special points, her breast panted and her colour rose, as she pictured to herself the rapture of her new friend,

his astonishment, his eagerness to know who was the author, his intense congratulations when at last the secret was revealed to him. With his words of praise ringing in her ears, Pamela fell asleep in the early morning, and when she awoke the day had long begun.

It was a chill autumn day, misty, and sunless, and Pamela's heart answered to the weather's mood. Her nocturnal elation had gone. Suppose, she thought, that after all Mr. Cunningham Burgess had not appreciated this work of hers? She dawdled about, feeling disconsolate. Her occupation was gone, and for the first time since her arrival at Fulcroft she felt lonely. She began to wish that Leonard were with her. She could have told him of her hopes and fears, and he would have listened patiently all day while she discussed the possibilities of Mr. Cunningham Burgess's announcement.

The day, too, did not brighten. The sun remained veiled and the air continued sharp. The low sky looked very threatening, and when Pamela sallied forth to her rendezvous, she wrapped herself in a cloak and took an umbrella. It was not a romantic equipment, and Pamela felt depressed.

Mr. Cunningham Burgess was awaiting her at the usual spot, and he greeted her at once with his accustomed airy hilarity.

"How the weather has changed!" he cried. "I've had a fire. Is it too cold for you to sit down? I've brought a rug on purpose. Let us have a good talk. About this MS. now. Who wrote it?"

"I don't think I can tell you," replied Pamela. She began to be very fearful, and her teeth almost chattered. "What do you think of it?" she asked.

"What do I think of it?" said the critic. "I could tell you in one word. But I don't want to hurt your feelings. Is it a *very* dear friend of yours who has written it?"

So 'The Story of Clanrickarde' was damned! For an instant Pamela's consciousness went from her and she neither saw nor heard, nor felt anything. But it was only for an instant, and Mr. Cunningham Burgess noticed nothing.

"I would rather know," she said. "What is that one word?"

"'Rubbish,'" said he.

"Oh!" cried Pamela. It was the one sign of pain she gave. Then she rested her elbow on her knee and shaded her face with her hand. "Tell me why," she said, in a steady voice.

"Oh, there are fifty reasons, but the one that suffices is that the whole thing is radically inferior," said the critic lightly. "The plot is too sensational, the dialogue is too stilted, the characters are either too heroic or too villainous, the fun is childish, the tragedy is burlesque, the *dénoûment* is silly. The whole thing is utterly commonplace. I expect that it was written by one of those smart young ladies who do the dress correspondence columns in the fashion papers. My sister takes in *Edith's Magazine*, and there's a certain "Rosebud" who writes in it, whom she thinks a great deal of. I've read

her things sometimes, and she has a dashing way of expressing herself, but of course it isn't literature. Am I right? Was the MS. written by one of these soap-and-perfumery-and-newest-thing-in-skirts-ladies?" said he, laughing.

"And if so?" said poor Pamela.

"If so, tell her to stick to what she can do and not try to soar higher than her little tinsel wings will take her. It's the kindest message I can send her. Don't let her imagine she has the gifts to produce a readable novel," said Mr. Cunningham Burgess, unconsciously almost repeating Leonard Venn's words.

What Pamela might have said in her vexation, and whether she could have much longer concealed her chagrin, I cannot say; but nature was good to her, and at that moment the rain came pattering down in large drops upon the fallen leaves, and Mr. Cunningham Burgess sprang up and said he would open Miss Worthington's umbrella and see her home. And this he insisted on doing, though Pamela, who had desperate visions of drowning 'The Story of Clanrickarde' in some stagnant pond, begged him to leave her.

"Good-bye," he said at the door of the cottage, carefully handing the MS. to her. "You go back to town to-morrow? We shall be safe to meet in the winter. Be sure you give your friend the authoress a little judicious snubbing."

Then he trudged away through the rain, quite unconscious of the havoc he had wrought in Pamela's soul; and Pamela, flinging her hat and cloak upon the floor, wildly set light to the fire, and with feverish haste began to tear up her MS. and thrust the leaves between the bars of the grate. It was a holocaust of her ambition, of her heart's desire, of her highest hopes, and the tears almost blinded her as she pursued her task. But she never wavered. Mr. Cunningham Burgess had unwittingly hit her very hard; but his plain speaking had opened the eyes of her mind, and she saw herself now as Leonard Venn had always seen her. She went on piling the leaves upon the flames, crying all the time, abusing herself for her conceit and stupidity, and wondering how she could ever face even the few persons who knew that she had retired into the country to write a novel that should set the world ringing with her name. But anyone who has ever seen the MS. of a three-volume novel will know that it cannot be consumed quickly, and by the time the conflagration was over, Pamela had cried till she could cry no longer, and her fever and excitement had given place to a dulness and heaviness, and a feeling that it did not matter whether she lived or died, or if the whole world knew that she had tried to write a novel, and Mr. Cunningham Burgess were told that she was "Rosebud."

And while she sat there, gazing drearily at the smouldering mass of paper, while the rain dripped upon the window-panes, someone tapped at the door; and when, in a dismal voice, she said, "Come in," Leonard entered.

"How do you do, Pamela?" he said, in his usual quiet way. "I was in the neighbourhood and thought I would drive over. What a smell of burnt paper!" he went on, approaching her. "What is it? All the daily papers all the time you've been here?"

Pamela gave him her hand.

"It is my novel," she said, huskily.

"You are unhappy," said Leonard, keeping her cold hand in his. "Tell me all about it."

Then she burst into tears again and told him everything, and she felt comforted, merely because he was with her.

"You were right," she concluded, wiping her eyes and trying to smile. "Oh, Leonard, how you must despise me!"

"Nay," said he. "Despise the woman I want for my wife? That is impossible. Pamela, dearest, have I won you?"

* * * * *

When Mr. Cunningham Burgess met Pamela again she had been transformed into Mrs. Leonard Venn, and he thought she was a charming married woman.

"And what about that novel?" he asked her one day. "Did you make the authoress see she was impossible?"

"I did," said Pamela, looking thoughtfully into the fire. "She was the "Rosebud" of *Edith's Magazine*, and it was very clever of you to guess it. In fact, your perspicacity in that direction made her believe you. She burnt 'The Story of Clanrickarde,' and she is married since and laughs at herself for ever having posed as a novelist. But do you know," said Pamela, laughing, "if you care for the honour, you share one secret with her which her husband can never know? You read the ill-fated MS."

"He need not be jealous," said the critic.

"If he is like me he is not jealous," said Leonard.

"He need not be," remarked Pamela. "Though I own it pleased me at first, because I cared for the author, I see now that it was very stupid.

FAYR MADOC.

LETTERS FROM SOUTH AFRICA.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "The Bretons at Home," "In the Lotus Land," etc., etc.

East London. *May*, 1893.

CARE AMICE,—My last letter concluded with a short description of the miseries of East London.

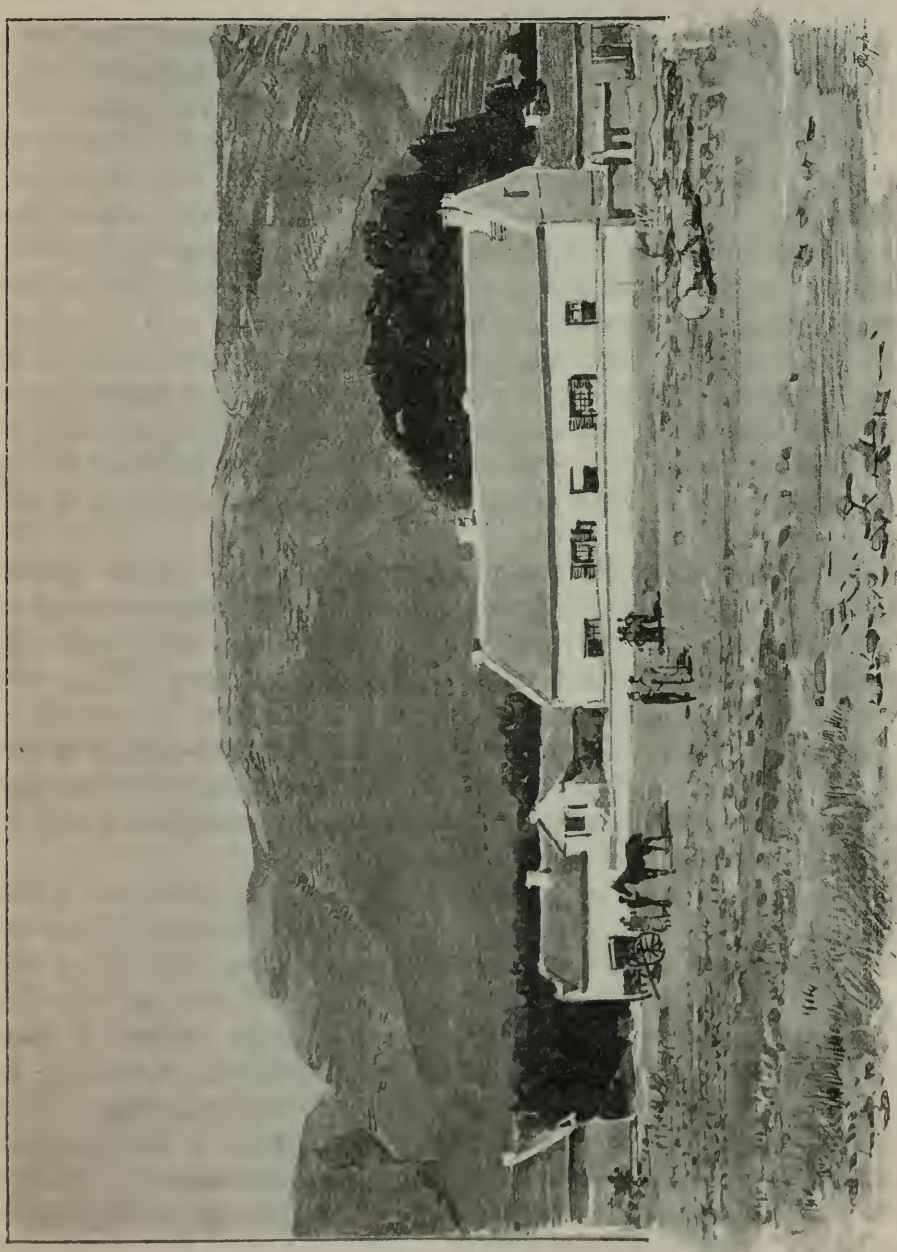
Before continuing that theme, let me say a few words about our experience from Grahamstown and the long drive we took in that most uncomfortable conveyance, a South-African post-cart. Yet so fine was the weather, so exhilarating the air, that, glad as we were at the end of some fourteen hours to see the lights of King Williamstown, I think we could almost have done it all over again, after an hour's rest and a supply of "cakes and ale."

We started from Grahamstown, you will remember, about seven in the morning. The previous Sunday was closely observed as a day of rest. To anyone with nerves a little overwrought by much travelling, the stillness was very soothing, and one could imagine the remainder of the week more blessed for this due observance of the Law. The great question with regard to Monday was whether to travel to King Williamstown by public post-cart or private conveyance; and we found that however unwilling they were to bring out their carts on Sunday, they were quite ready to take a great deal of trouble on that day for a possible customer on the Monday—something after the manner of the Quaker selling his cow. But there was nothing very inconsistent in this: nor anything very heinous.

We hesitated a good deal. On the one hand we should be more comfortable in our own cart; might command it; stop and journey as we pleased; have everything at our disposal, including a good and obliging driver. But this driver only used a pair of horses, and, unlike the official post-cart, was not bound to a certain time. If the horses grew tired, or a wheel gave way, or the harness broke down, we might be late for our Tuesday morning train, and miss the vessel at East London. If one could only see into the future!

On the other hand, the post-cart was bound to be in the same night, and to do that he drove four horses, if not occasionally six. It seemed impossible for a pair of horses to do the work of four or six in the same time. Even thus he was not supposed to reach King Williamstown before seven at night—and, as it turned out, he did not reach it before nine. Yet with my present experience if I had to do the journey over again I think I should risk the private conveyance.

We started with five persons besides the driver. The cart was one of those awkward arrangements where the passengers in the back seat have to take their place before those in the front seat can get in. This front seat, holding two and the driver, our landlord had secured



SOUTH AFRICAN FARM.

through a telegram sent from Capetown; with liberty to give it up if we changed our minds. Our fellow-passengers were quiet, inoffensive men, who, knowing the road well, rather preferred the back seat to the front: an amicable division of interests that does not always

happen. One was a minister evidently belonging to the Dutch Church, for he spoke very little English. He had been visiting Grahamstown and was returning to his own charge. The other two were commercial travellers, quiet and intelligent: a calling that in South Africa is no doubt very different from that of England, exacting less keenness of wit and wisdom.

Fortunately the day was lovely from first to last: for had it rained deluges and blown a hurricane as it has since, we must have put up with it. What the misery would have been during that fourteen hours' drive, I dare not imagine. In the first place, it would certainly run on to twenty hours, if not more; for post-carts, like sailing vessels, reserve to themselves the qualification of "wind and weather permitting." But the day was one of those perfect days which sometimes herald a mighty change. We enjoyed it to the utmost, nor dreamed of the future.

So about seven o'clock we finally started. Our host did all he could for our comfort in the way of cushions, etc., and wished us *bon voyage;* informing us that if ever we returned to Grahamstown, we should probably not find him there. He and his wife had had enough of hotel-keeping, and were going to sell the inn and retire to a farm in the country.

The surly and silent driver—whom as time went on we dubbed Surly Solon, charitably attributing his silence to wisdom—disposed of his letter-bags, got into his place, cracked his whip, and away we went with all the willingness of four fresh horses. They were not admirable specimens, and certainly would not have won the Derby; but one soon finds that in South Africa post-horses have to work too hard and constantly to take after anything but Pharaoh's lean kine. Yet these we started with were fine creatures compared with some we exchanged on the road.

Crossing the railway, we passed out of the town, and from henceforth had nothing but country to occupy our minds. Here and there was a small solitary settlement, and that was all. Very soon we seemed to leave all life and civilisation behind us. On first quitting Grahamstown we entered upon a great extent of grass-land: long undulating slopes, green and beautiful, where all the cattle in the world might find pasture, so wide the sweep. Then, where it grew more wild and rocky, we passed a lonely-looking sanatorium, 500 feet above the level of Grahamstown. In this lonely spot the air is more pure and bracing, and invalids congregate. And not only invalids; for sportsmen find occupation amongst the hills and a certain reward for a solitary day's tramp; and so the house, lonely without, is often anything but lonely within. To us there is inexpressible charm in these wild solitudes; but it is one thing to visit them, and another to live amongst them for ever.

A singular small colony; a little company out of the world, dependent upon each other for society; an oasis in the desert. Though

not so far from Grahamstown they might for all seeming be in the wildest parts of Zululand.

We did not stay here, even to exchange greetings, but went on and changed horses about a mile further on the road, where we also took in another mail bag: wondering where they would finally be stowed away if taken in very often. Before the end of the journey the passengers had to put up with a good deal of inconvenience.

It would be difficult to describe the beauty and charm of the drive, especially its first part. Much of the scenery was magnificent, and that I am told is the exception in South Africa. Here and there you come upon spots of rare grandeur, which remind you of the finest parts of Europe, but they are few and far between. Such are: the Hex River Valley within a day's journey of Cape Town, and which we hope to see by-and-by; the Gates of St. John's River, or the Umzimvubu, which is reached by a journey through Pondoland; a small section lying between Port Elizabeth and Natal.

The river flows to the sea through a cleft in a lofty mountain. The steeps on either side are forest-clad, the precipitous cliffs are 1200 feet high, and the view is considered almost the finest in the country. Within the gates it is equally beautiful, but less wild: low hills surround the water, which resembles a huge lake, in whose calm depths the verdant banks find their placid reflection. Most beautiful are the Tsitsa Waterfalls, in Kaffraria,—which is only another name for Kaffirland—the largest in the Colony, 150 yards across, and nearly 400 feet deep. The rushing, roaring sound may be heard for miles across the wide plains, in this rarefied air: and in this dense silence and solitude, this immense stretch of the heavens above, the falls are almost more impressive than those of Niagara. This thousands of tons of water for ever falling is such a mighty voice in the wilderness.

Beautiful also is Queen's Town with its neighbouring snow hills: long-drawn-out undulations contrasting with the pale blue of the sky, all dazzling in the matchless atmosphere; the little town, with its white roofs and sheds and tiny towers sleeping in the hollow, like the sole guardian of a world that has returned to the ice age.

Beautiful are the wide plains of the Karroo, bringing back life and health to many a hopeless invalid; a few farms dotted about in vast and solitary plains with thousands of acres attached to each lonely settlement.

Beautiful, we have seen, was the Victoria Drive round Table Mountain, with its luxuriant vegetation, its hills and passes, its silver trees and rich vineyards. But here one never loses the feeling of being in touch with life and civilisation. Round the corner of that gigantic hill, though we cannot at the moment see it, lies a great colony of houses, a crowd of human beings; and the desert-like feeling of solitude, of being "the last man on earth," is never there.

But a good deal of this is felt on the drive from Grahamstown to King Williamstown.

Here and there we stopped at small road-side shanties, dignified with a long name and a post-office; exchanged letters or took in a fresh mail bag, wondering where they all came from. Often in the wide plains not another house or settlement was visible.

The scenery in this early part was very fine: especially so at Pluto's Vale, where the hills seemed to have been playing at nine-pins, and to have settled down anyhow; splitting up into chasms and precipices, here rocky and barren, there soft and beautiful and rich with purple heather, with numerous wild flowers, with lovely specimens of the soft and silky cotton plant: a flower which always brings to memory the far-off but no less wild and desolate island off Stromness where Norna of the Fitful Head was wont to resort, and where her deformed, uncanny dwarf Pacolet found his abode. There the stones still lie, just as that wonderful Wizard of the North with his magic described them. For here we first saw the wild plant growing in such abundance that in a very short time we might easily have gathered enough to spin a winding-sheet for Norna and all her tribe.

In our South African drive was room for a myriad Nornas and Pacolets. Surrounding these wooded undulations and deeper valleys were apparently endless sweeps of country, soothing and beautiful to the vision: outlines soft and billowy, as if here too the mighty ocean had once had it all its own way, and, retiring, had photographed its presence for ever. Above was the clear blue sky; a bright and sparkling air that at all times ought to dispel life's gloomiest visions; air and tones only to be found in these latitudes. Our lean kine went with a will, galloping up-hill, sweeping round curves, apparently enjoying it all as much as those to whose pleasure they certainly contributed; knowing well that at a given point work for the present would be over, and the greater toil the sooner rest. It is useless to say animals have instinct but no reason; they must have reason; it is not this which separates man from the animal world, but something higher still.

Sometimes on our way we came to a steep ascent or descent, when it was necessary and infinitely pleasant to get down and walk. For a spell we left the high road, and wandered into the soft, springy turf, rejoicing in all the fresh scents of nature, all the wild flowers that gave them. With many we were unacquainted; had never seen them in England; but that only made them more interesting. What we felt most of all, I think, was the solitude; the unbroken almost eternal silence of these vast spaces; the absence of life; scarcely a bird, and never a living animal of any sort. They exist no doubt, but evidently do not abound, and they know how to hide themselves.

This added immensely to the impression of the drive. And at

long intervals we came to the usual shanty; the settlement with its quaint name and invariable post-office. But our arrival caused little excitement, and often the owner, who probably wrote himself Postmaster, and was a sort of mayor and corporation, Justice of the Peace, and landed proprietor all rolled into one, did not even condescend to come out to admire our fine cattle and speed us on our way. The work of exchanging letters and letter-bags was transacted within, and we were not admitted to mysteries as sealed as the secrets of Freemasonry, with its unknown signs and inquisitorial renown.

As time and the drive went on, we came to Committee's Drift, and the Fish River Hotel. Where the Committee assembles, who it can be composed of, what the weighty affairs it discusses, these questions for us will remain amongst the unsolved mysteries of creation.

So with the Fish River Hotel. Its guests one would think must be few and far between; perhaps a handful of disciples of Walton who come here occasionally to see what sport the water will give them. They will find repose and quiet, if nothing else. Yes, something more; the situation is beautiful; and we felt we could here spend a week very happily.

It was small, and as far removed from fashion as the poles—imagine "fashion" in a South African desert; but given the place to ourselves and what glorious revellings might we not have. What risings and settings of the sun; what wanderings over desolate heaths; what sparkling air; what fish for breakfast or dinner, of our own taking from the stream hard by; what moonlight nights, the whole vast country bathed in silver beams; what phantom-haunted plains when midnight chimed upon the far-off clocks of Grahamstown; chimes inaudible to our ears but not to the ghosts of the past, who know nothing of time and space. And what twilight meditations, not with Harvey amongst the Tombs, but even greater solitudes; this endless tract of beautiful country; these breezy downs; rejoicing in what Adam Lindsay Gordon has called God's glorious oxygen; full and free here as anywhere on earth.

This, however, for us was a dream and a vision, as we wandered through the little rooms of the hotel; tiny rooms a few feet square and a few feet high, where antiquated photographs were disposed in books about the table; faded and of a day long gone by; making us feel quite antediluvian, as we remembered with a shudder that such crinolined curiosities had been seen in our infancy. Photographs of people who have long joined the congregation of the midnight ghosts, and which make one so hopelessly depressed and melancholy, as page after page is turned over in search of something of our present day and generation.

On the walls were prints of the Royal Family, of many dates and ages. These we find everywhere, and it seems to me that the South

Africans are nothing if not loyal—all honour to them. Yet how much more might belong to the Queen's dominions if it had not been thrust back upon them whether they would or no; mighty districts, large countries of incalculable wealth and influence. Think of the rejected Transvaal, with all its unknown possibilities.

So we gazed with pleasure on these royal libels upon the walls; the libels did not matter; feeling and sentiment were everything. The little rooms were clean and neat; there was not a thing out of place; it might be that they had never been occupied, and to-day certainly the inn was empty even of the very ghosts of visitors.

We soon pushed onward, crossed the bridge over the river, and looked into depths where no water was. The river had almost dried up; its bed lay exposed to the sunshine, red, rugged and rocky. Where were the fish and what doing? Congregated perhaps in pools and eddies, further up-stream or further down-stream, waiting for Heaven's floodgates to unloose and set them free. They have not waited long; the rain we have had since ought to set all torrents roaring with tenfold noise, and fill all rivers to overflowing. The Scotch have a homely proverb: "The mickle makes the muckle." There are many renderings, but all have the same bearing, and this is short and direct as any: by the same token it is wonderful how quickly the thousand tributary streams that flow into a mighty river will cause the lowest and driest to rise and overflow its banks.

So we went on, out of the lovely valley, up hill, through wonderful stretches of country, over boundless undulations, until at last we reached Breakfast Vlei.

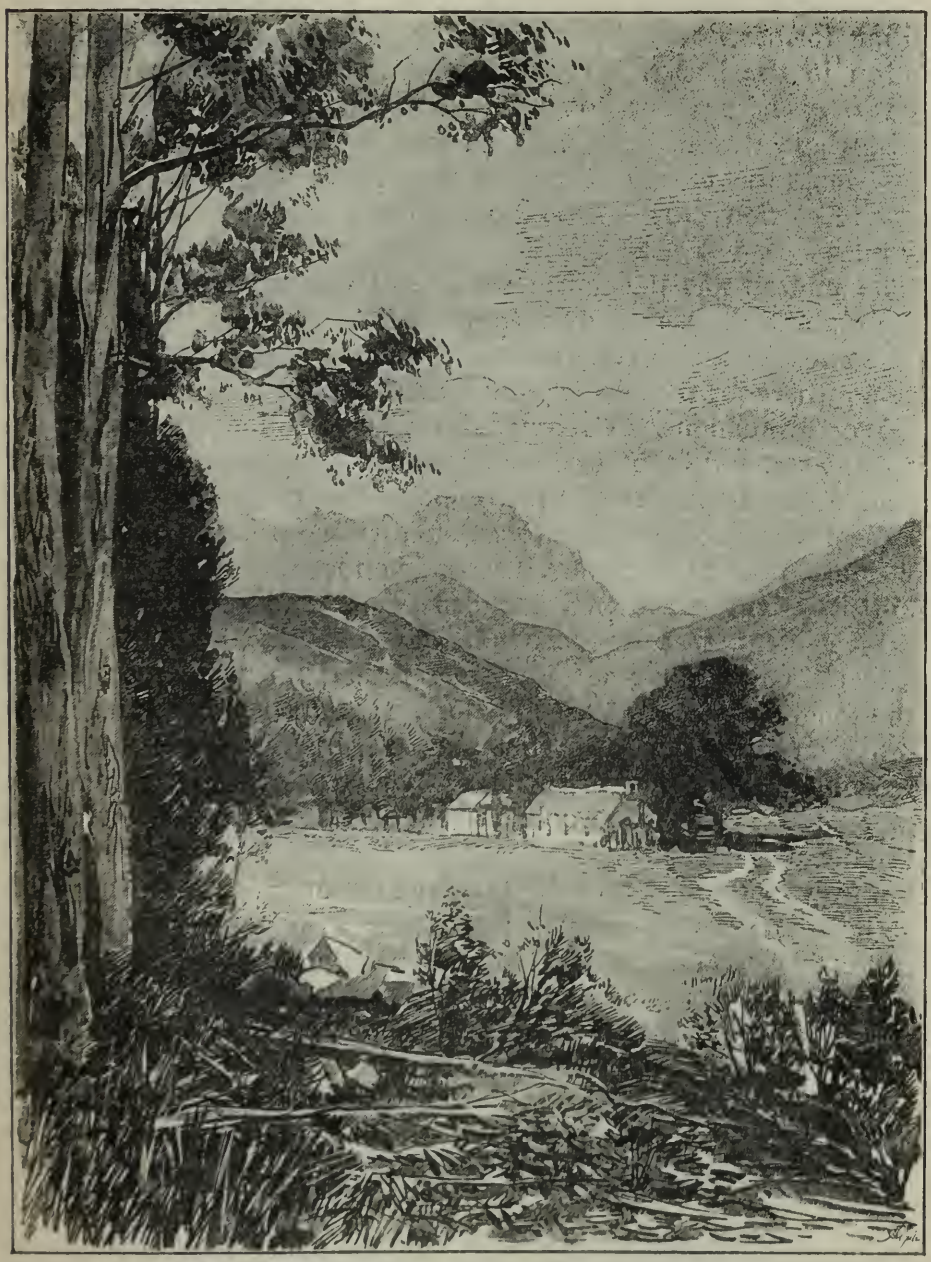
This is a sort of half-way house, though we were a little more than half way on our journey.

And here we were supposed to get down and refresh ourselves with baked meats. The landlord was the very sort of man one might expect to see in these desert wilds; civil and good-natured, taking life easily, therefore substantial and comfortable in appearance; a physical condition no doubt encouraged by the wonderful air. For the house, or inn, stands upon high ground; on the highest of breezy undulations, overlooking the country; the heavens above forming a magnificent dome; blue sky and green earth blending in that eternal harmony that has existed since the creation. If we had imagined we could spend a week at Fish River, still more we thought so here. But for that inexorable *Dunottar*, we should certainly have remained; no other earthly power could have drawn us away.

Here too it was a small house, very much like an enlarged shanty or bungalow; with small low rooms where one would want the windows for ever open to the glorious oxygen. But here, as elsewhere in South Africa, it grows cold at night, whatever the warmth of the autumn or winter day. This is one of the charms and merits of the country. Even in hot summer weather, at sundown a breeze springs

up, the nights are cool, and you wake up the next morning restored and refreshed, ready for the "burden and heat of the day," no matter what that may be.

To-day it was autumn, and bright and beautiful as sky and



South African Farm.

sunshine were, it was by no means too warm, but just what we would have had it.

Within we found a sumptuous repast it was well to do justice to—those who were by any means able; there would be no further chance of a substantial meal until King Williamstown—and the

hour of that consummation was far more uncertain than the appearance of the frolicsome ghosts on the midnight plains. There was more than one course, let me tell you, of which the *pièce de résistance* was the substantial leg of a South African-down sheep; which might now be wandering about its prairies on three legs, waiting further demands, or might be reposing as good wholesome mutton in the larder. I don't know how these things are managed over here; but to kill a whole sheep at once in these wilds, where people come and go like angels—in point of numbers only—must be to risk disposing very much of it to the jackals and the carrion crows—who do not deal in money or pretend to pay bills.

The mutton was delicious; we almost wonder the fragrant fumes did not allure the jackals even from far-away haunts; its flavour had all the sweetness of heather and all the tenderness of age. There was wine and beer for those who would, and tea and coffee for the more frugal or abstemious. H. ordered beer and I longed to join him, but prudence and far-off doctors forbade. They brought him a huge bottle, a little smaller than a nine-gallon cask, but one of the travellers was good enough to come to the rescue. In this world one must not be backward in coming forward. We were rather afraid it might make him too convivial and "approaching;" for it was evident that he accepted the beer not altogether out of consideration for H.'s welfare; but it had no evil consequences. If the tongue was presently a little loosened, it was employed in giving information about things on the road and places and people, which proved interesting and instructive. Thus, if you feed a sheep with grass, he repays you with wool; and if you—but I need not continue; the simile suggests itself.

I was quite the first to retire from the banqueting-room, and found mine host comfortably sunning himself on a long bench outside his own property, smoking what is known in England as a long churchwarden: most wholesome of all pipes, it is said, for those who sacrifice to the fragrant weed. You, who know everything, may have heard the anecdote of Robert Hall. How a lady of his congregation one day went into his vestry and found him, as usual, smoking. "Ah, Mr. Hall," she cried, "at your idol again!" "Yes, ma'am," he replied; "*burning* him." But the idol burns on for ever.

So mine host was at his idol, the embodiment of calm, lazy contentment. Probably in this out-of-the-world spot, where nature seems to sleep her life away, he felt he could hardly do better than follow her example. As soon as I appeared he looked concerned.

"You surely haven't breakfasted already, sir?" he asked in tones of true feeling.

I assured him I had done so, and well.

"But it can't be well," he objected, "or you must have an amazing

small appetite. After such a drive as you've had and such a drive as you've got before you, it doesn't do not to lay in a good stock of fuel. Feed the furnace, and keep the engine going at full speed; that's my motto. Now couldn't you go back and take a little more?"

I assured him this was impossible.

"It isn't right," he persisted, evidently mentally uncomfortable. "I don't like it. I can't bear taking people's money if they haven't had their money's worth. It's as unpleasant as the opposite extreme —cooking food for people who bring their own provisions with them; stale sandwiches, messy oranges and such-like. I always say live and let live, but these people want it all on one side, and that side their own. You have no idea, sir, the uncertainty of such a house as this. Sometimes you dress good, wholesome faring: a splendid leg of mutton or half a dozen fat fowls that yesterday were enjoying life in their own flighty way, and perhaps every traveller comes up with a bag of stale sandwiches—all the food they allow themselves on a fourteen hours' drive through fine bracing air. You, sir, if I might make the remark, by the way, look as if a spell of this bracing air—a few months or so—would do you no harm. You remind me a little of my old grandmother up in Scotland (I felt flattered); she was easily pressed down, poor old soul; but then she was easily pulled up again. Now a few months of this Breakfast Vlei air——"

"Would make a man of me," I laughed, "and then I should cease to remind you of your good old grandmother. If ever I visit South Africa again, a week at Breakfast Vlei shall be one of the items of the programme. But now, to change the subject, tell me the use of that little church I see close to your house; and where the congregation come from; and who ministers to you on a Sunday."

"Ah, sir, I don't wonder at your asking that question," returned our interesting host. "You see this great sweep of country, and never a habitation in sight to keep one company. But for all that we are not without neighbours; ay, and white-faced neighbours too; more than you'd think for. Not so very far off there's a small settlement, and we often muster quite a congregation on a Sunday; and most Sundays we have a parson, morning or afternoon; and we often have more people staying here than you'd fancy—some for the air, some for a little sport; some for one thing, some for another. Only last week two ladies arrived, and were so taken with the place they said they should like to come again and stay a fortnight. I told them they'd be right welcome. But presently I overheard a little conversation between them. 'It's lovely bracing air, Jemima,' said one; 'I should really like to spend a week or two here. I think it would do us so much good.' 'So do I, Keren-happuch,' said the other old girl—what funny names they get hold of to be sure! 'And though it's very

lonely, I think we should be safe,' she went on. 'The landlord looks a good moral sort of man; I don't think he would attempt to be too familiar. Do you?' 'We never know,' answered Jemima; 'but I flatter myself I know how to check undue familiarities.' Well, sir, I thought I should have died with trying not to laugh. The good old souls were both turned sixty, and wrinkled and grey; but law, some of the dear creatures think that they are like a green bay tree, beautiful for ever. So they are, bless them; but it's inward, not outward beauty. Time doesn't spare them any more than he spares mankind in general. Ungallant it may be, but it's true. And there's Sulky Jem putting his team together, so I suppose time's pretty well up. I call him Sulky Jem, but it may be Sulky Tom or Dick for all I know. I'm quite sure, now, sir, he's given you neither song, nor smile nor sermon coming along the road. Thank you, sir," as I paid our debt. "I feel as if I was robbing you, though I daresay the others have more than made up for your deficiency—not that that's altogether the right way of looking at it; but I think it's mostly the way in which the world makes both ends meet at the end of the year. Those who work hard and have money pay for those who don't; and so the great balance is struck."

Here our philosophic landlord bade us farewell, for the cart was ready, and if the fiery steeds were not pawing the ground with impatience, I daresay they had done so twenty years ago. The little church stood out in the immense plain as a warning that time was passing and the sun sets even on the longest life. We shall probably never see Breakfast Vlei again, but it was a small oasis in a wide desert, and made some impression upon us. A strange existence, this passing through life out of touch with the highways and byways of the world; seeing nothing of mankind excepting such as the chances of travel throw in one's path. The solitude of the tomb seems only a step further.

Away we went, exhilarated by a rest, the viands of the banqueting-hall, a new team. All this had not added to the amiability of Surly Solon, but we were now growing accustomed to his taciturnity, and the way in which he threw in the mail bags at the different stations regardless of life and limb. He had bargained to take the cart to King Williamstown; his passengers must look after themselves. Remonstrance was useless; with these natures, it only adds fuel to fire. Supposing you have a friendly neighbour whose dog keeps you awake all night, and you politely point out that you are slowly dying of want of sleep and irritation of the brain. He listens with the most earnest expression of condolence and regret, and you go on your way rejoicing; but the chances are that after that you will be kept awake by a maddening duet, whereas before there was only an irritating solo.

After Breakfast Vlei we made a steep descent to the Keiskamma River. This also was dry and rocky, and we crossed at a drift

SHEPHERD'S HUT.

without difficulty. When the river is full horses, cart and passengers have to be ferried over. We were told they were about to build a bridge, which would certainly improve matters, and in progressive South Africa of course this will come, with a thousand other improvements and luxuries. Let us hope that post-carts and surly drivers will be amongst the first if not the last.

The remainder of our journey was even wilder and more desert-like than ever.

Desert-like in its solitude, not from endless hills, and plains of sand such as one meets in the Great Sahara. Here everything is green; soft and soothing to the eye, which knows not how sufficiently to take in all the wild and desolate beauty.

Now and then we came upon a kraal in the midst of a green plain; a few dome-shaped mud erections with a hole for going in and out. One shuddered at the close atmosphere of the interior, even in this wonderful air.

Some of the kraals looked deserted, as if their inmates were sleeping or away; at others they were squatting at their doors, or in a circle round a fire—for as the sun went down the air grew chilly; and a very slight fall in temperature means winter and discomfort to these dark, scantily-clad Kaffirs, barbarous and uncivilised, full of cruelty towards each other; a great crowd of people waiting to be humanised and converted. What has been done is as a teacupful of water to the ocean, but no doubt the difficulties are overwhelming. Occasionally, we saw ghastly objects with faces whitened, wrapped in their blankets, "wandering away into the wilderness" on some penance demanded by their superstitious religion, there to pass many days in solitude: one can hardly add meditation, for what can their minds consist of? Even the most intelligent amongst them can have few ideas, and strange must be their thoughts of life if they think at all.

As twilight fell these solitary creatures made one feel intensely melancholy, and somehow reminded one of that passage in the Bible where the scapegoat, laden with the sins of the people, is sent into the wilderness to die.

But this poor, barbarous Kaffir race, has no doubt enough sins of its own to atone for without burdening itself with those of others. Still they are not cannibals, and compared with the Bushmen and Hottentots, are almost civilised.

The latter are the primitive races of South Africa, widely separated from each other, yet descended from a common origin. It is a relief to hear that both Bushmen and Hottentots are dying out. Their language, like themselves, is primitive, consisting as much of sounds as of words, the latter only monosyllabic. Going about almost naked, they never build houses or huts, but sleep on the bare earth or on a few dried sticks thrown together. If game and milk can be had, well and good; if not, they fall back upon roots, herbs and insects. They think nothing of killing a human being: and if you meet one

unexpectedly in the veldt you must either put a bullet into him, or he will put an arrow into you with fatal and most unerring aim.

The Kaffirs, with all their barbarous ways are very different from this: well-built, powerful men, who will treat you civilly, are sensible of kindness, and possess, to some extent, civilised laws. They have a religion of their own, but are full of superstition, believe in witchcraft, and make free use of the accusation against anyone they may want to put to death. The tortures introduced at such times are terrible. This is the power of the "witch doctors."

These tribes are about 600,000 in number. It is only about seventy-five years since missionaries first began to work amongst them, and their progress has been very slow and limited, for want of both Government and private support. They are still for the most part very much in heathendom; without real religion, without morality, full of savage customs, unenlightened and cruel.

As we passed along the road, these occasional kraals, especially in the twilight, looked weird and desolate. There is something incomprehensible, inexpressibly depressing, in the existence and condition of these human beings, with all their undeveloped capacities, their animal modes of life, throwing themselves down at night like sheep and dogs, and rising in the morning with no idea of life's best work: thinking only how they shall that day find their bread or rid themselves of a troublesome neighbour. To them life has no responsibilities, beyond that of the heathen: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

Now and then Surly Solon would throw a word to one and another, receiving an answer that sounded like an explosion of mild crackers. He was evidently more in sympathy with them than with his travellers.

Once we passed a shepherd's hut which looked rather more substantially built, though much after the same pattern. Dark-skinned, thick-lipped women sat outside with children playing about, and as we passed they gave us a very decided nod, and a grin that showed a wide mouth and set of teeth which fairly made us shudder. It was all meant for friendliness, and the minister behind us gave them a friendly word, which we were glad to hear. These wayside greetings may touch hidden chords and do good: give rise to a wish for something better than this brutish condition; unconscious aspirations that may even be counted as a prayer. They have souls, these poor, benighted heathen, though their expressions are limited; there must be times when their souls awake to consciousness, and make themselves dimly, vaguely, uncomfortably heard.

We journeyed onwards, always onwards, always through the same green plains and undulations, boundless, unlimited.

At last we came to Iquibeka, and here seemed quite a small colony.

The surrounding country, a series of vast undulations rich and

green, is said to be some of the best pasturage in all Cape Colony. On the top of one of the undulations was a large, wooden shanty, well built, well kept, well painted : the inevitable post-office. Near it were one or two well-conditioned wooden houses, always in the form of bungalows, surrounded by flourishing gardens with dwarf trees, and a profusion of flowers : a small paradise in the midst of a desert.

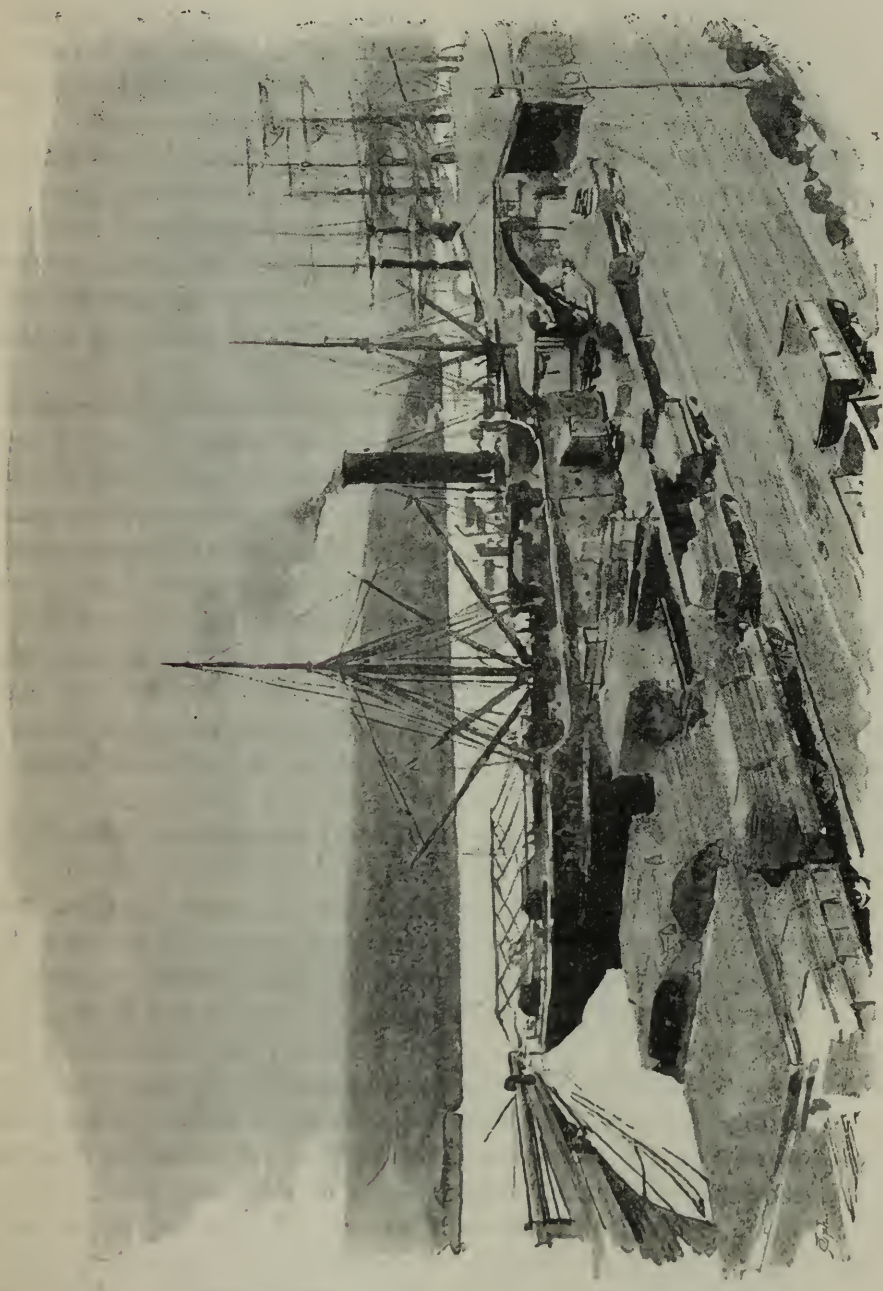
Down a sloping road we walked for a quarter of a mile up to the "hotel," with which we were not greatly taken, though the "bar" seemed well supplied with every wine, spirit and liqueur under the sun. Here we had some good tea—for it was the tea hour of the afternoon—and a mysterious cake of the country, about which we asked no questions, lest its merits should evaporate: like that excellent soup that in the far-off days was served day after day to some delighted naval officers in distant seas, and was daily praised, until accident discovered the soup to be made from cormorants : when the charm was broken, the doctor was hastily summoned, and several deaths ensued. We are all creatures of fancy, and all know that at times "'tis folly to be wise."

Whilst waiting—we halted nearly an hour in this oasis—a wild party of some half dozen men in blankets and head adornments came winding up the road. They turned out to be a small company of Zulus passing through the country, and making their way to a drinking shed near the hotel, looked wonderfully picturesque and effective ; tall, well-built men, with perfect limbs and chests that anyone might envy ; eyes full of fire and intelligence, betraying energy, and a temper dangerous when roused ; but *un*roused, full of amiability and good humour, as the Zulus almost always are. As far as our limited experience has gone, the Zulus seem the finest, most intelligent, most amiable of all the South African tribes ; and well taken in hand, civilised, Christianised, would prove "wood that would bear carving."

There appears to be quite a small colony at Iquibeka, probably of farmers, for the sake of the matchless pasture. But the few people we saw looked more like horse-dealers or betting men, with the peculiar air which distinguishes these gentry ; hanging about the hotel like birds of passage. No doubt the few real settlers were elsewhere, at work and out of sight. Possibly, too, there are farms about the country we knew nothing about ; but, gathered together, forming a fair population. It was certainly the only spot we passed on the road that looked in the least inhabited.

Presently Surly Solon was ready, and we had to be ready also. He would wait long enough to suit his own pleasure, but not one moment for ours, and if we had not been at hand when the horn blew, would certainly have gone without us. Away we went once more, our horses full of mettle, prancing and cutting capers. Where the energy came from, poor, lean cattle, we knew not. But we made good way. Here the road was less evident, and we often found our-

selves bowling for miles over the soft springy turf, nothing, as it seemed, but faint tracks along the grass to tell us that we were in the right path. We came upon more kraals, more shepherds' huts, all



HARBOUR, EAST LONDON.

few and far between, breaking in upon, never relieving the desolation of the drive.

Finally we reached Debe Nek, the last station ; where we found an hotel, built upon the usual lines: a sort of bungalow, with a wide verandah. A faint idea of a settlement also: a store, which seemed to deal in everything under the sun, though the population to be

supplied was of course invisible. But the owner looked happy and flourishing, as if he were very quickly making a large fortune, and meant presently to come back to England and get knighted and go into Parliament.

Before the hotel was quite a cultivated garden, with sweet-smelling flowers, all enclosed in a low paling. And in the verandah, reclining at full length on a long chair, his head raised by pillows, was an invalid who looked in the last stage of consumption. The only thing that made us hope he might be getting better was an expression of serene content, almost merriment, upon his face; as though things were looking up with him, and he should presently take his part and lot in the world with the best of them. Was it really so? Or was it the cruel-kindly nature of the disease buoying him up with false hopes to the last? I should like to know, as time goes on—but I never shall know.

For we halted only a very short time, to make up perhaps for the longer spell at Iquibeka, where the driver evidently had a very large visiting acquaintance. Surly Solon was behind time, and we were beginning to feel that the end would be welcome. But many miles had still to be traversed, and it was evident that the end would not be reached before nine o'clock.

Twilight, too, was falling; darkness would soon follow.

Here, too, Surly Solon would insist upon taking up a man who wanted to go to King Williamstown. We were quite full, and although on our small seat were so wedged that herrings in a barrel never were packed more closely, he roughly bade the stalwart intruder "shake himself down."

But human endurance has its limits, and we revolted; this thing should not be.

The intruder, as welcome under such conditions as the thirteenth guest at dinner, was sensible enough to see that no one would suffer from the arrangement more than he, and quietly made himself a comfortable seat between us and the dashboard with the help of the letter-bags, where with a gun awkwardly pointed at various heads in turn, he managed to keep everyone wide awake in a chronic state of terror. Fortunately it never went off. How far the bags suffered, especially if any of them contained love-letters, or wedding cake, or any other tender and delicate article, could only be imagined.

Close to Debe Nek, they seemed to be constructing large engineering works; building a bridge, or something of that sort, and a number of mechanics, as the sun went down, were just giving up work. Evidently in South Africa they know nothing of the eight hours movement. Here we are at the base of the Amatola Mountains, whose wooded heights stretch their heads afar off; and here much sport may be had, so that our intrusive friend had probably found his gun very useful quite apart from the excitement of killing—by fright or otherwise—human beings. Round

about us the undulations were more marked, and that was the only difference in the features of the landscape.

But presently there came one of the finest sunset effects ever seen in this world. Twilight was creeping over the earth. The plains were growing dark and mysterious: that wonderful tone which thrills every artistic nerve we possess. Above, the sky was still light, and stretching far upwards from the west, were the most wonderful clouds, the highest, most ethereal, most golden you can imagine, an exact counterfeit presentment of the ruins of some glorious ancient city. It might have been a mirage, but more gorgeous and splendid than any mirage ever witnessed. Crumbling temples, fallen pillars, and crowds of desolated thoroughfares, were all outlined in these magic celestial pencillings. Then as the sun sank yet further from the horizon, the gold changed to crimson, and the whole ruined city appeared on fire: until presently the flames died down, and everything was blotted out in the darkness of night. No doubt this remarkable sunset, which seemed almost phenomenal, was indicative of the terrible weather even then about to arise, but we knew nothing of this. We only saw in it something which glorified our drive; a scene never to be forgotten; a sunset perhaps never to be equalled.

Darkness fell, and dreary and desolate but full of nameless charm were the plains. More strange, more appealing than ever, were the few solitary Kaffir huts we passed; more desolate and terrible the solitary figures wandering away into the wilderness. The stars came out and flashed as they can only flash in this atmosphere; but the moon had not risen, and it was often so dark that Surly Solon could not always tell whether he was on the road or off it. After the sun went down it grew chilly, and we, lightly clad, having seen no banqueting-hall since all those past hours at Breakfast Vlei, began to feel the wisdom of our philosophic host's remarks, and again "wished for the end."

It would not come any the sooner, and the last part of the drive seemed the longest.

Yet it had its compensation; dark plains full of mystery, full of meaning and solemnity; an apparently endless world, in which the vast silence was only broken by our travelling. Here and there in the distance, the fires of the Kaffir kraals blazed up and threw their reflections to the skies: and, faintly outlined, the dark people might be seen squatting round them, no doubt shivering in their blankets, and waiting their hour for turning in.

Once we passed very near to one of these fires, where the Kaffirs sat round in their witch-like circle; and as the flames flew and flickered and lighted up their faces, they looked, with their huge mouths and flashing eyes, like demons assisting at some fearful holocaust.

A strange sight, this condition and state of existence, this dark-

raced people, squatting in the midst of these far-off solitudes of earth, watching the flames they had kindled rising heavenwards; chattering amidst themselves with rasping voices and gestures that every moment seemed to threaten sudden death to their neighbour, though probably they were only meant to express a rude affection.

We have to see these conditions of life to realise them; and there would be infinite pain in the sight if it were not that one feels how the back is fitted to the burden; how these rude barbarians are happy in their own way; know nothing better, desire nothing better; ask of life nothing more than a blanket, and hunger satisfied, and a mud hut to shelter from the cold.

As to their conversion, it would be a good thing undoubtedly, but, as far as one can gather, it is being done in a very half-hearted manner. And then—give them new thoughts, new hopes, new aspirations, and you must alter their condition of life. What would you do with them? But no doubt a way would be opened up; necessity would find the remedy. After all, I am not sure that we have not worse heathens at home; where conversion properly taken in hand ought only to be a work of time; yet generations succeed each other, and it is not done. If we take the trouble to search, we shall discover sights and sounds almost within our gates that would eclipse anything found amongst these natives of South Africa, who will only be judged according to their lights.

So we thought and felt as we journeyed, now losing our track and bowling over the green turf, whose undulations often threatened to overturn us; now finding our way back into the high road; ever and again meeting a team of oxen drawing a huge waggon. On each of these occasions there had to be shouts and signals, until the whole team was brought to a standstill whilst we passed. Most of the waggons were white and covered; but once or twice we came upon a huge uncovered cart crowded with noisy dark people; and we wondered whether here, too, these people pack up and move from kraal to kraal, or go in for moonlight flittings, or take excursions for the benefit of their health. On what mission could they possibly be bound? From our surly driver we could learn nothing.

At last we saw, afar off on our right, the twinkling lights of King Williamstown: a welcome sight at this untoward hour.

What we found when we finally reached them I cannot tell you now; but I may tell you to-morrow, if we are yet prisoners in East London. For we are still here, and I have beguiled the hours in writing to you. Could I have done better in this hope-forsaken place?

For still the elements are raging, if possible worse than ever; and they have been raging ever since we arrived yesterday morning. I then thought they had reached the height of fury, but I was mistaken. The constant downpour of rain threatens another deluge;

people look anxiously at each other as if they feared a visitation. It has been said that rain calms the sea; I will never believe it again. The waves are running mountains high; they are thundering upon the shore; they dash over the pier and breakwater, which must have foundations solid as the earth itself, to stand these mighty

ROCKS THAT WITHSTOOD THE STORM.

shocks. The spray, white and beautiful, seems to reach to the heavens, as wave upon wave beats and breaks upon the shore with a sound of artillery a million times magnified.

The rain ceases at intervals; and in those intervals H. and I go down to the harbour, and venture as far as the breaking seas and stormy winds will allow us; and it is ever the same awful, fearful,

glorious and magnificent sight. If we only had comfortable quarters, and were not in hourly dread of seeing the *Dunottar* suddenly turn and disappear towards Durban, how we should feast and revel in this wonderful conflict of the elements. Never but once have I seen anything finer: when in my boyhood's home, one severe winter, the sea was frozen far out, and huge blocks of ice rose up like little hills, hill beyond hill, and the very waves seemed to have petrified in the act of breaking.

But there is no freezing to-day, though the air is by no means tropical, and there the good *Dunottar* rides upon the storm like a thing of life, buoyant as a bubble, proud in her strength. If only she will so remain until that terrible signal cone falls, and announces our deliverance. But will she do this?

For the hours are running on, and the hurricane seems unwilling to stay its mighty hand, and there is a limit even to the patience of long-suffering.

WESTWARD!

Tell me, thou burning sky,
  Where like a king the day
In gold lies down to die,
What lands beyond thee lie—
    Teach me the way.

Think not I'll mind the cost,
  Look back once I begin;
Let me go where thou goest,
Were it to Eden lost
    Through Adam's sin.

Thou who so far from men
  Shinest, yet seem'st so near,
Heav'n needs thee not! Oh, then,
Remain with us—remain
    For ever here!

Julia Kavanagh.

DUNSTAN'S AMBASSADOR.

A ROMANCE IN COLLEGE.

PROFESSOR OLIVER JEFFERIES sat in his college study one June afternoon; a tap at the door, and his friend Alfred Dunstan entered.

Alfred Dunstan was, like himself, a bachelor and a Fellow of his college, but he was round-about, florid and short-sighted; irreverend youth called him "Tubby" Dunstan; Oliver Jefferies was slight, tall, and though unmistakably shy, distinguished-looking. The friends nodded, and Dunstan took a chair.

"I have called to consult you," he said, in his piping voice.

"I am at your service," Jefferies answered in his rather hollow tone; there was a mellow echo in his voice which was very effective, especially when he had nothing important to say.

"It is rather a delicate affair," Dunstan went on, fanning his round pink cheeks with his cap; "the fact is, my mother, you know my mother?"—branching off somewhat irrelevantly.

"Yes, I know your mother," Jefferies assented, in a voice which recalled responses in church; Mrs. Dunstan was an oppressive old lady who had come to live near her son when he got his Fellowship at St. Anthony's: she said very little, sighed a good deal, and had the bearing of a depressed white caterpillar.

"My mother wishes—you know what mothers are!—that I should—ahem—that I should——"

"Be vaccinated again. I think she is right—there is so much small-pox about everywhere," Jefferies said.

"Nothing of the sort," Dunstan answered testily; everyone, even people who stammer, resents having their sentences finished for them; "my mother is very anxious to see me married!"

Oliver Jefferies said nothing, which was distinctly unkind, and his friend continued hurriedly,

"You see, I am the last of our family; there have been Dunstans of Devil's Dyke for the last thousand years; we claim descent from a nephew of the saint, and naturally my mother wishes—why the deuce don't you say something, Jefferies?"

"I was waiting to hear your mother's wishes," the professor answered gravely.

"Well, she naturally does not want the race to die out," Mr. Dunstan concluded with a defiant air.

"She would like you to marry," Jefferies repeated musingly; the idea was new to him—none of the Fellows of St. Anthony's had married during his time: to think of little Dunstan taking the lead in this way!

"It is a strange notion," he went on, looking stedfastly at his visitor; "have you thought of anyone in particular, a concrete wife, or is it still an abstract——?"

"Hang it all, Jefferies, you are rather a wet blanket," cried poor Dunstan, taking out his large Irish linen handkerchief and dabbing his forehead excitedly.

"I thought as we had always been so intimate, that I would come to you for advice and help, but you aren't very encouraging, and—and you seem to think I don't know in the least how to set about it!"

"Forgive me," said his friend gently, "I am really interested, but the idea has come to me with all the force of novelty, and I should be, myself, so at a loss to proceed in such a case that perhaps I unintentionally underrated your ability to deal with it. Pray continue, my dear fellow, and let me hear what steps you intend to take to—er—reorganise your family. I might know, very well, that a Dunstan will never lack initiative."

Little Dunstan appeared pleased with this explanation, yet he coughed and was somewhat slow to go on.

"The fact is, Jefferies, that even I, who may reasonably be supposed to have inherited, in a special manner, the necessary nerve for an emergency, find myself a little uncertain how to act. You see, I've never done it before, Jefferies; I could, I am positive, propose for another fellow very tellingly—for you, Jefferies, for instance, but for myself there is a diffidence, a——"

"A diffidence which in a Fellow of St. Anthony is wholly out of place," cried his companion; "as to proposing for me to anyone, you must not think of such a thing. I have nothing to offer a lady in comparison with your ancient and honourable name (the judge with whom we are remotely connected was far from being any recommendation to a family man). Your position at the University, your own genial nature, and your mother's affectionate welcome and sympathy. But I give you my heartiest good wishes, and I feel assured that when these advantages are laid before any lady she will not reject them."

"That's just it," Dunstan rejoined, excitedly. "That is where you come in, my dear Jefferies. You see, I can't very well go myself to the young lady, and say, 'My family is of a thousand years' standing, my record in the University is second to none, my mother is very anxious to receive you, and would give us all the necessary linen and plate; I am the easiest person in the world to live with, and it is a hundred pities that I should be the last of my race.' Such an address would not only sound very inflated, but might perhaps offend her delicacy of sensibility. But if a friend, such as yourself, were to undertake the mission, and insinuate tactfully that a man of rare birth and breeding, a Fellow of his college, blessed with an affectionate parent and the wherewithal for a refined and congenial home (you've never seen my mother's rat-tailed forks, Jefferies), was likely to be the last of his name and stock unless she accepted him—this would be a

testimony that the most fastidious female could scarcely take exception at. And for the man in question, think of the relief, all plain-sailing then, the ground cleared by a skilful, diplomatic friend. Just say you'll do it for me, Jefferies?" cried Dunstan, dropping his hypothetical case and coming to sheer downright entreaty. "You shall have my everlasting gratitude, and my little Aldine 'Horace' that you've always envied, and I'll do as much for you, I swear I will, whenever you require it."

"Heaven forbid," cried Oliver, but though the idea of prosecuting Dunstan's wooing for him almost took away his breath, he did not altogether repudiate it. No man cares to confess himself less courageous in such matters than he is supposed to be, and the very singularity of the enterprise had a strange attraction for the shy man, notwithstanding that he shrank from an ordinary dinner-party or morning call as from an epidemic; Dunstan saw his advantage and pressed it.

"You've only got to get her alone for a few minutes—you can choose your own time, I'm in no special hurry, and sound her about me; the thing is simplicity itself for a third party, and you'll soon see which way the wind blows," he answered his friend. Somehow, before he was quite aware of it himself, Jefferies had consented.

"By-the-bye, you haven't told me who the lady is."

"Can't you guess?" said Dunstan, with a simper.

Oliver reflected. He had visited once or twice at the house of old Mrs. Dunstan, but he did not remember to have remarked any special intimacy between that lady and any others of the University set; neither could he identify any particular Queen of the Revels in connection with Dunstan's own modest lunches and teas at his rooms in college during the May week. But as the lover seemed expectant he hazarded, "Miss Lindley?"

Miss Lindley was the Principal of Zenobia Hall where Dunstan occupied the mathematical chair, and was a lady in every way fitted to become the wife of a professor, which is saying a good deal.

"Good gracious, no!" cried Dunstan, quite snappishly, "Miss Lindley must be thirty-five, if she's a day, and my mother would never permit me to introduce a second professor into our family. What do you say to Miss Baby Primrose?"

* * * * *

After Dunstan had left, Jefferies began mechanically to dress himself in the conventional garb which society demands of the afternoon caller, revolving in his mind the subject of his friend's wooing. It was extraordinary, almost uncanny that Alfred's choice should have fallen on little Baby Primrose, the girl of all others furthest removed from the serious life and interests of the University, under whose shadow she had sprung up, like her pushing, unabashed flower namesake, staring out of the crevice of some reverend pile of building.

The girl who spent all the summer days playing tennis with under-

graduates, who whispered at lectures, and laughed outright during the performance of Greek tragedies; who seemed to regard the glorious Alma Mater herself as a mere institution to provide herself and her sisters with balls and boat-races, flirtation and frivolity! Why, the very evening before Jefferies had met her at a Don's drum and had been unwillingly drawn into her vortex; for some freak, she had dismissed the half-dozen boys who surrounded her, and had insisted on establishing herself on a distant and conspicuous sofa with Oliver, where she had plied him with conversation on lines altogether novel to the Professor.

In the course of it he discovered that for aught Miss Primrose knew to the contrary, the sun went round the earth, once a day, or once a year, she was not very sure which; that Sir Isaac Newton discovered steam engines, the circulation of the blood, and American apples; and that Lord Byron, among certain undesirable works, wrote 'Our Boys,' which was a perfect gem, and fit for any one to enjoy. All this store of learning Miss Primrose imparted to her companion with such a battery of funny little arch shrugs of her white shoulders, such merry and yet wistful glances of her violet eyes, such candid interjections as, "I know I'm not a bit clever, but one can't live in a place like this without picking up some little scraps of information on deep subjects!" that Jefferies, apostle of thoroughness as he was, had been interested against his will. "In my inmost heart, Mr. Jefferies (only you mustn't repeat this to anybody), I have always longed to be a Zenobia Hall student, only how could mother manage that with six of us girls, besides the three boys? So I've just had to give up that dream, and stick to cooking and shirtmaking and sock-mending! It is only when I get a chance of talking to a man like you, that for an instant I realise what the ideal life of intellect means to those who are free to follow it! And oh, Mr. Jefferies, that reminds me, are you coming down to the tennis-ground to-morrow afternoon?"

Jefferies had come away from the Don's drum at eleven o'clock, strangely and unusually moved. It seemed as if he had looked behind a veil into a hitherto unsuspected votive chapel, where the dreams and ambitions of a young life had been laid down, and the burden of domestic duties and household mending had been cheerfully taken up instead. Mrs. Primrose, though she had painstakingly married several of her elder daughters, had still a large family to support on very slender means. Well, if he proved an astute ambassador, there would be another anxiety off the good lady's shoulders; if Miss Baby longed for the educational advantages of Zenobia Hall, surely the undisputed profession of its mathematical professor would satisfy her wildest dreams? Dunstan was a good little fellow, and Jefferies would do his best for him—it was a pity he was so short, and tubby, and red in the face, and had that terribly unattractive black-bombazine mother, in her Berlin-wool-worked drawing-room, to back him up! Oliver could not but recognise that

Miss Baby, with all her ignorances, was a lover of the beautiful; every touch of her little dimpled hands on the cluster of white peonies at her waistband, every glance of her eyes, and every childish enthusiastic word as she described the sunset after the thunderstorm on Monday, came back to him, as he rummaged fiercely for a certain cream-coloured necktie to replace his sober black scarf; one does not go out deliberately to woo (even for somebody else) every day in the week, and "where on earth has that tie got to? there seems nothing but socks that want mending!" groaned the professor, and then found himself blushing at a foolish association of irrelevant ideas.

However, he was ready at last, and glancing deprecatingly in the glass, saw the reflection of a very gentlemanly figure—tall, slight, intellectual-looking, a little pensive perhaps as befits the heroic leader of such an ambassage: he would do his utmost for Dunstan's suit.

* * * * *

"So you've come, after all!" cried Baby Primrose joyfully, as Oliver picked his way somewhat self-consciously round the tennis-lawn to her seat: "I hardly dared hope you would, because I was afraid I had been too—well, had bored you too much last night, but all the same, I——" She did not finish her sentence, but looked down suddenly, and twisted the bangle on her little round wrist.

"I came because I wanted to continue our conversation," said the professor, going straight to the point.

"Did you? then you weren't bored?" cried Baby, looking up for a moment with delighted eyes. "No, I won't play just at present, thank you," addressing a host of advancing parti-coloured flannelled boys; "I am tired, and the sun is very glaring; if you will play a gentlemen's sett, and let me rest a little, I shall be quite fresh by-and-by," and she led the way to a seat a little apart from the group where her mother dispensed easy chaperonage to the assembled young people.

"You spoke last night of having wished to become a student at Zenobia Hall," Jefferies began, seeing his way clearly to the introduction of Dunstan by this conversational channel; a sudden, quick glance from Baby's violet eyes—was there a shade of disappointment in them?—disconcerted him, and he hurried on, rather inconsequently, "I have been thinking ever since, that is to say, it has been suggested to me—that there is another way of attaining that knowledge to which you feel you might have devoted yourself, had you not been held back by—by family circumstances. If you found, for instance, that, that——"

"Yes?" put in Baby with a little thrill of curiosity in her voice.

"That a man—a professor, let us say—who had hitherto only loved learning for its own sake, was beginning to realise that in imparting all he knew to one other—yourself—he would be satisfying a yearning which had long oppressed him with its vague unrest; if you knew that such a one distinguished you among all the other women who

surrounded his successful path, that he longed to share with you the treasures of his mind, the position which his talents have won for him, the ancient name whose honour he has held unsullied——" Jefferies paused to take breath—he could not, no, he could not, touch more particularly on old Mrs. Dunstan and her Berlin-wool-work welcome.

"Yes," said Baby again, but this time so softly, so faintly, that the monosyllable merely sighed past Jefferies' ear like a breath of the summer breeze—"go on."

"If someone told you all this," Oliver continued, warming to his subject as he saw himself now within reach of the goal, "would you be content to forego the girlish excitements and interests that have hitherto claimed your attention? Could you place your hand in his and say, 'Henceforward your aims, your aspirations are mine; mould me, make me what you will, not a mere Zenobia Hall student dabbling on the outskirts of wisdom, but a real woman—a professor's wife?'"

There was a moment's silence. Some pigeons began to coo on the wall of St. Anthony's behind them, a cry of "Love one" rang out in front. Baby Primrose looked up, and putting her little warm, pink hand into Oliver's, she whispered,

"Take me, make me what you will!"

Then Oliver saw he had blundered. He made one gallant effort to put matters straight, though with Baby's hand fast held, and her shoulder so close to his it was a desperate move, but honour, friendship, and the little Aldine 'Horace' swayed him still.

"You know Dunstan," he murmured with dry lips, "Alfred Dunstan of St. Anthony's and Zenobia Hall, he and I have always been close friends, and I feel indeed——"

"Of course I know Mr. Dunstan," Baby answered; "he has always bored me horribly; but if he is a friend of yours I will do my best to like him. You don't think I am the sort of woman, Oliver dear, who could be disagreeable to her husband's old chums? Poor little fat Mr. Dunstan—'Tubby' the boys call him, you know—he shall never feel that his friend's wife has deprived him of his friend. He has enough to try him already in that dismal old woman, his mother, and if you are fond of him, there must be some good in him for me to find out. Dearest, that is just what I have felt about myself ever since I thought that you first began to care about me!"

After that, Jefferies struggled no more.

* * * * *

There has been a coolness between Jefferies and Dunstan since the former married, and the little Aldine 'Horace' has certainly never changed hands; but Oliver is another man since the Primroses took him so heartily into their family circle, and report says that Alfred is courting Miss Lindley of Zenobia Hall himself.

G. B. Stuart.

FURTHER ADVENTURES OF A GUINEA PIG.

By C. J. Langston.

THAT Church Building Society which hesitated to confirm a grant to me in 1877, because I had "made the inclination of the seats too comfortable," would be highly gratified at the discomfort I have experienced in sundry prayer-desks and pulpits.

The former are usually now placed at the entrance to the chancel, and so cribbed, cabined, and confined, owing to the extension of choir stalls, and the inrush of cherubs in surplices, that I never felt so much what Sheridan termed "altogethery" in my life. I cannot move without treading on my neighbour's toes, or sending stray leaves of special anthems flying and fluttering like dead leaves in December.

Such close companionship has other drawbacks: for at St. M. N. I impinged on the alto, a stout carpenter, who had sought to strengthen his vocal chords by a liberal allowance of raw onion, whilst on a bench just beneath me sat two sweet little songsters partial to paregoric. At quaint K. the chancel was restored, an elaborate wrought-iron screen erected with expensive choir seats: when, at the last moment, it was found that the entrance to the prayer-desk had been forgotten, therefore hinges came to the rescue, and the front opens like a door. Once bolted in, there is safety; but any pressure against the book ledge, unless the bolt is securely fastened, will cause an unseemly sprawl, and an involuntary obeisance to my Lord H. just opposite.

A common mistake of architects is still further to lessen the book board by placing crockets and finials at each end. Such obstructives to sound and sight are highly objectionable. The space is cramped, the fine old service books are discarded for inferior ones with small type and thin leaves that stick together, and I am puzzled where to place banns-book, hymn-book, and notices. Only the other evening, when diving behind me for the Church Hymnal, the slip on which the hymns were noted got lost in a labyrinth of leaves. After turning over many a new leaf with whirlwind rapidity, and magnifying that awful pause, I found, just in the nick of time, the concealed treasure.

More trying still are the narrow strips of wood covered with a semblance of carpet which some of the clergy deem decorous for kneeling boards; as if devotion were quickened by having one's shins barked, or a stinging pain in the knees. Occasionally these instruments of torture are loose, and cause a spasmodic jerk in the petitions by a sudden tilt up; or they are placed so far beneath the desk that the muscles are strained in the effort to keep on.

Our Nonconformist brethren have the advantage of us in their roomy platforms for preaching. I doubt if Diogenes would have become

famous with only half a tub: and what can be expected from a parson pinioned in a packing-case. I have just returned from High Littleton. In the church every prospect pleases, and only the pulpit, so fair to look upon, is vile; the architect having contrived to enclose it within the sharp, projecting mouldings of an arch, leaving the unfortunate preacher but a few inches wherein to follow the Demosthenic dictum —action—action. If I moved, there was a stone cutting my back, if I raised my hand to point a moral, a sharper point impaled my fingers. If in avoiding Scylla I sailed to the entrance, there was the Charybdis of unprotected steps: so that the poetry of motion had to subside into dull mechanic exercise. I well remember the carved oak pulpit at Smeeth, with its huge sounding-board and tortuous steps, which encroached so greatly that little standing-room was left, and the least lateral movement made me shudder on the brink of a down-fall; and that still more ancient pulpit at Brook, so narrow that it could only have been made for a sandwich man, or some ascetic monk who answered to the definition of a line.

How amusing was the experience of poor little R. J. of the C. M. S.! The vicar of a Cheshire parish where I was about to preach had invented a contrivance on the screw principle, by which the clerk could either raise or lower the floor of the pulpit to any level. "During the hymn," said J. (a total abstainer), "I felt myself 'screwed' for the first time, and the idiot did not stop until my knees were visible; when, seeing his mistake, I came down with a run which did not lessen the too audible titter, or my own confusion and fright."

He added, that on another occasion, three disused hassocks gave him the proper elevation. These proved so unsteady that he was obliged to grasp the pulpit ledge with one hand, and during the sermon, needing this to find a reference, the top hassock glided backwards, and he suddenly disappeared with a bang, Bible and all. When Robert bobbed up again he was in one sense considerably *lowered* in the estimation of the auditory: or, as the churchwarden observed, "the man, not the sermon, was shorter."

An amusing arrangement still exists at St. James's Church, Bath. Before the sermon, the pulpit, a veritable Jack-in-the-box, is wheeled to the east end of the nave, and after the fifthly has been disposed of, is duly trundled back again.

Some years ago, the curate in charge of this church was Mr. Warner, an intimate friend of Dr. Samuel Parr, who complained that during the recital of the creeds no one could be heard but the clerk, who would persist in rushing far ahead of him in the responses. When the lisping lullaby of the learned doctor was heard in St. James's pulpit there was "silence for a space," for the Bathonians remembered that the little great man had recently bearded the Chief Justice in open court at Warwick, answered the "What? What?" of "Farmer George" with more than courtly

candour, and would have been a bishop but for demonstrative Whiggism.

The sliding brass rod supporting the stand by which the height of the manuscript can be regulated is convenient; but it is well to ascend the pulpit and test its capacity before service, for often there is a screw loose. Leaving the adjustment to others, more than once when pressing the leaf of my sermon, the whole thing has rattled down to the socket with a rush which thrilled me with consternation; and a friend not noticing that a second mechanical arrangement to alter the inclination of the sermon-rest was not fixed, had no sooner waxed eloquent than his MS. went flying over the pulpit on to some feathery hats below. Not having the readiness of Dean Stanley, on a similar mishap, to improvise until its recovery, he stood quietly until a blushing damsel handed it up.

More awkward was the dilemma of my old tutor, the Rev. J. F., who discovered just before afternoon service that he had left his discourse at home.

He knew exactly where the precious MS. must be, but could the rustic nimble-toes, however fleet, accomplish the considerable distance in thirty-five minutes? The lessons were short—his hopes centred in the two hymns, the old-fashioned choir harking back at every second line, and lingering with loving tenderness on the last syllable, and the harmonionist delighted in voluntaries. Never had he read more deliberately, or with greater regard to punctuation. As Farmer Bourne said, "It wer like a traction ingin a goin' up Broadway 'Ill!" Many a furtive glance when the spacious door creaked; many an anxious thought as the state prayers ended. And now the second hymn is given out, two more verses only, and—but, oh, rapture! the west door flies open as if impelled by a boot, "and fills with light the intervals of sound" below the singing-gallery; a youth appears, wiping his forehead with one hand, in the other bearing aloft triumphantly, "plain for all folks to see," a roll of paper, as he strides up to the reading-desk—"A reprieve," thought J. F., "just in time."

A somewhat similar incident occurred to me when taking duty at Painswick and Pitchcombe.

Just before leaving home I directed a newly-arrived man-servant to carry my hand-bag to the Great Western Station, and wait on the platform, where I shortly arrived with my niece. Alas! "I could not see my little friend, because he was not there." We scanned every likely and unlikely place. Could he have gone to the Midland Station?

The train came in, I rushed up and down, peering anxiously among the crowd, lingered at the carriage-door till I was slammed in—just had time to hand the key to my niece with directions to send the MSS. by post—although I doubted their timely delivery—and then we were off; I to a remote village among strangers, without a particle

of luggage; and, worse luck, minus my sermons. It is all in the volume of life, thought I, but I *should* like to slip this chapter.

Arrived at Stroud, I was directed to a homely hostelry, where an ancient carrier's cart, with benches round three sides, was already packed inside and out. The bulky ladies inside had equally bulky parcels, lightly covered with brown paper which rubbed off at every unusual jolt, when the sharp angles of dutch-ovens and other tinware indented my knees, whilst streaky samples from the meat market rolled into my lap. "Aggrawashun in a cart is *so* aggrawating," quoth William Marigold; and it was a relief when I could be handed out with other miscellaneous articles at Painswick.

"Where are your things?" said my clerical host. I could not even exclaim with John Gilpin—"They are upon the road!"

However, I was fitted up before dinner at the hospitable vicarage, and retired early; but only to have fitful dreams of some hiatus in the service—some attempt, Sisyphus-like, to get up the hill of difficulty, and ever rolling backwards—until I awoke during the small hours with a nervous headache. It was well to rise and draw out two skeleton sermons—sheet-anchors to stay this weak vessel from grinding against rocks ahead, or drifting into the Dead Sea of platitude. There *was* a Sunday delivery, but of course this particular morning the postman was unusually late, and I was on tenter-hooks. We had started to Pitchcombe, distant three miles, and the man was driving me in a magnified tub up the first hill when I espied the well-known uniform. Yes! there *was* a packet for me; the next moment the precious manuscript was in my hands, and the skeleton was relegated to the cupboard. Drive on, coachman, the tub has been lightened on my side.

At a time when services and celebrations are attended with such minute ceremonial and care, incidents which recall the easy-going days of our fathers are rare.

The church at C., rebuilt some fifty years ago, is lofty and spacious, with a massive tower, which like a hoary sentinel has watched the restless tide of humanity sink into silence at its feet nearly five hundred years. "The sweet church bells began to peal" at 10.30; but, when I arrive, ten minutes before service, weary with walking, all the doors are locked, and a sharp white frost forbids any rest on a tombstone. Icy cold without and within, where the commonest deal boxes tell a plain unvarnished tale, and one small stove with a long, black perpendicular pipe draws murky moisture from the roof, which drops in circular patches on the service books, and trickles down my neck. When the bell stops, one or two rustics saunter in, and a solitary farmer's family presents a bright little oasis in a desert of deal. The choir centres in a side pew behind a scarlet curtain, where a young woman presides at the harmonium with two sisters alone to vocalise; but at the second service the instrument is wheeled into the chancel, where another lady

plays and sings solo, three hymns and the usual chants—a performance ecclesiastically unique.

The arrangements for the celebration were equally primitive, and I whispered to the deaf old clerk :

"I do not see the bread ?"

"Eh, sur !"

"The bread, the bread !"

"Oh, I chopped he up and put 'em in the cup."

This would have suited the lax custom of the noted Dr. Drake, Rector of Langton some forty years ago. "He would walk up the aisle of his church," writes Lord Teignmouth, "to the vestry, whistling and tapping his boot tops with his whip as he went along ; and when in good humour whispering, as he passed, to the ladies in the squire's pew, that he would give them a short sermon. He might be seen standing at the Lord's Table whistling audibly as he drew the cork from the bottle, whilst the few communicants were chiefly old people who attended solely to receive a share of the alms."

Akin to Dr. Drake must have been that quaint rector in Somersetshire (where my genial friend Mr. F. lived), who was requested by his Bishop, at the instance of the churchwardens, to hold a second service in the parish church.

"Want a second service do they," growled the irate parson ; "well, they shall not express this want after next Sunday."

On that day there was the usual full service at eleven o'clock, before which the churchwardens almost regretted their presentment, the rector being so very cordial ; but what was their consternation after the benediction at 12.30 to hear him exclaim from the pulpit : — "And now, my dear friends, in compliance with your ardent wish, and the request of our beloved Bishop, I will at once proceed to hold a second service, therefore, John" (to the clerk below), "toll the tenor bell."

But to return to my former subject.

Anxiety from a different cause awaited me at the early celebration at All Saints, B., where everything is certainly done decently and in order. On that particular morning the master of the ceremonies forgot to appear. In vain the solitary bell clamoured, "Sleepers, wake !" two æsthetic ladies alone responded, and I had to prepare the Holy Table, an easy matter in the days when "a fair linen cloth sufficed," but now, what with serviettes, veils, and other befringed and belaced appendages, somewhat puzzling.

The bread had been sent, but where was the wine ? Every nook in the vestry was searched in vain. Bottles, many, but wine, not any ; at least none beyond a sediment of what seemed like blue ink in one disused, dusty bottle of ancient date—odourless, flavourless. The bell-ringer had left, the ladies were waiting. "Neck or nothing," thought I, surveying the elongated bottle, and the service began. A few oily, half-congealed drops oozed out ; but I was by no means

sure until the service was over that I had not been administering poison.

After another celebration in the same town, where the church would seat 1200, and was attended by about twenty, I was reverently about to consume the wine as the rubric enjoins, when the curate eagerly stepped forward and said, "Please don't; we always put that back in the bottle."

The dear old incumbent, whose scant breath made any such exertion trying to his auditory as well as to himself, would persist in reading the Commandments. He got over the ground fairly well in the short ones, but was heavily handicapped with the second and fourth. The way he set his shoulders, and took a flying leap over several words in succession to avoid pulling up before reaching a full-stop, was startling. He was very old-fashioned too, and the use of the black gown was imperative; and, as I had to resume the surplice for the offertory, and the hymns before and after the sermon seemed singularly short, the on and off business was purely pantomimic. How I struggled and strained to get into a robe much too small. Shall I ever be in time, thought I, as the slits for the arms got hidden in the folds, and the back would not draw up without an alarming crack, and then I stiffened into the letter T.

Three months since; but now the kindly old man is dead, and altered days bring altered ways: "What shadows we are, what shadows we pursue."

Speaking of clerical robes, an amusing circumstance happened to my friend B., also an old-fashioned man, who knew nothing about the elaborate finery in which officiating clergymen array themselves. It was in Septuagesima, and he received especial instructions from the absent rector: "Be sure you wear the violet stole, or my people will be shocked."

Anything to oblige, thought B.

In a cold, dark vestry, without seat or mirror, he thrust his head through a superfine surplice which reached to his knees (he would never, he declared, disfigure himself by a cassock), and seeing on the table a long slip of blue silk, with elaborate ends and crosses, he put it on. A troop of choir-boys came in, and flattened him against some prickly decorations. How those boys did nudge and titter! "It's their nature," mused B.; but when he followed them up the nave, and blushed as all the folks stood up, he was conscious, from certain smiles and looks, that he was creating unusual interest. What could it be? Perhaps that horrid surplice was half-way up his back. He gave a violent tug; no! that was all right. Then he remembered an inclination of one of his limited locks to shoot up with peculiar effect; but he felt that was in repose. When at the lectern, the squire's family in front bit their lips and visibly shook, he saw all that at a glance, and was more puzzled than ever; but there was no explanation till luncheon.

"My dear fellow!" exclaimed the invalid rector, "you have been wearing those beautiful markers which Mrs. F., our squire's wife, presented last week! These I sent to the vestry, meaning Henry to put them in the large Bible before service."

Oh, the worth of a button! How often does one's hood slip under the chin, or get entangled with the arm, because buttons on surplices, like plates at afternoon teas, are not fashionable. At a High Church, recently, during the first hymn, I was surprised to see a finely-worked cross half-way down my stole without any corresponding design, and was puzzled at this one-sided symbolism, until I discovered that this cross had slipped from the back of my neck, and that I had been marching in procession with two feet of stole one side and four on the other.

From the Church to the Parsonage is an easy gradation; and my general experience of country rectories and vicarages is most agreeable. Pleasant people, generous hospitality, and kindly forethought—a home, in fact, away from home.

Yet there are occasions when I miss home comforts. How often do I view with alarm the very small dimensions of the bedstead in the guest-chamber! Always a wretched sleeper, I endeavour to stretch myself on a framework of iron about 3 feet by 5 feet 6 inches, scantily padded, which admits only of a cramped, doubled-up position, and of no turning without the loss of layers of blankets. I think of St. Lawrence on his gridiron; and, like Eugene Aram—

> "All night I lay in agony
> From weary chime to chime,"

and bewail the fate which condemns a middle-aged man to bedsteads only fit for a Biffin or a boy.

"Hope you slept well, for that is my brother's favourite room," said my hostess during breakfast. He is a short Somersetshire man; I am six feet, so that I answered laconically, like the late Lord Aberdeen (who hated the sea), when about to cruise with the Royal family.

"The sea does not affect you very much?" suggested the Queen.

"Very much, Madam!"

"But you are not always ill, Lord Aberdeen?"

"Always, Madam!"

Then, again, although by no means a Sybarite, the diet now and then is somewhat trying. I have been led to associate one party in the Church with a cataract of tea and indigestible cold meat. At N. I always find a stringy, tough, cold bit of beef, which serves from the Saturday until the Monday, with the remnant of a bottle of whiskey, and well I remember, after a drive of five miles from the station, reaching B. Vicarage on the Saturday by two o'clock. The vicar was away courting, leaving the wife of a labourer in charge,

whose ideas of housekeeping were limited to hot tea and cold mutton. A roast shoulder at dinner was very acceptable, but when I was given the cold shoulder that night at supper, at three meals on the following day, and at breakfast on the Monday morning, it became rather too much of a good thing.

I always take certain flasks to fresh houses, not knowing what peculiarities may prevail, so that here I was not dependent on the tea-kettle. I found this provision especially useful at the small town of W., where a brand-new rector, inexperienced in all but his own crotchets, was red-hot on cold water, and rigorously lived up to the maxim, "After me the deluge." I had three full services, one being at a distance, with Lenten fare; so that when asked during my solitary supper, by the damsel in waiting, whether I would take cocoa, I replied:

"Have you any claret or other wine?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Any table beer?"

"Oh, dear no, sir! Master——"

"Well, have you such a thing as unadulterated warm water? because I will find the brandy!"

Exit damsel, petrified. Tableau!

The reference to cold mutton recalls anything but a sunny memory in Wiltshire, when, to my horror, I found myself one Saturday night in a remote vicarage in a nest of rigid, frigid Calvinists; and, as the very mention of that detestable dyspeptic is to me as the red rag to a bull, to hear the condemnation of all civilised theological thought from these pharisaical crones soon caused a fierce explosion, and I blew up with the dynamite of common-sense all their horrible conceptions. My unexpected thunder caused a sudden silence; and, as a punishment I suppose for the charity "which hopeth all things," at supper, whilst each of the elect was regaled with an egg, there was placed before me, with the stern mien of Mr. F.'s aunt, a joint of cold boiled neck of mutton, with a streak of lean no thicker than a halfpenny. This dose was repeated on the following night, when seeing that my hosts had no better manners than to inflict such a nauseating article, I exclaimed—"As I do not usually feast on mutton fat, I will take an egg."

That "Sawbath" was anything but a delight. We rose by candle-light, had family prayers at every meal, not a vegetable was allowed to be cooked, and conversation was chiefly confined to petty parochialities. The arrangements in the church were quite in harmony with Genevan simplicity. An oblong, whitewashed room, with gaunt beams crossing a nearly flat ceiling, and a varied assortment of deal boxes not over clean; whilst the font was actually fixed within the chancel rails. Anything less ecclesiastical it would be difficult to conceive. I read prayers twice, a visitor read the lessons, with prefaces certainly not to be found in the "use of Sarum." During

these lessons I had to sit on a small camp-stool, so wretchedly rickety that I grasped the adjoining seat, expecting a downfall every moment. I knew that the venerable vicar took several shots at me during his lengthy sermons when he was "five feet above contradiction,"

> "Dropping buckets into empty wells,
> And growing old in drawing nothing up;"

but "the man with the awful views" was case-hardened, and they did no harm. Next morning, what a sense of relief when the rattle-trap bore me away from this perpetual nightmare, and I felt once again the fresh free air of heaven.

In alluding to diet, why will ladies at these country parsonages spoil good food by selecting inefficient and juvenile cooks. There are my hospitable friends at C., most comfortable of vicarages, prettiest of churches, the centre of a model village and beneficent interests. When last there I was shown literally a prodigy in petticoats, for the young lady had not taken to long dresses.

"This is our cook," said Miss B. triumphantly: "the most regular attendant at the Sunday-school, and she has also passed the highest standard."

My dread of such literary qualifications was justified. Oh, those sausages, either like beetroot or sticks of liquorice; those eggs as hard as billiard balls, or so liquified as to run all over the table in search of the parent hen. Transparent tea with leaves all afloat: opaque coffee which one has strong grounds for associating with an iron spoon and stale sediment. The leg of mutton with an ebony outside concealing a deep strata of vermillion—"Just a leetle underdone, my love;" the tepid apple-pie with solid crust to prove there is nothing like leather, and apples flying off at a tangent when the fork pressed them into service. Thick toast too, with a small circle of brown set in a broad margin of white, and left flat on the kitchen table to toughen at leisure. What can be expected of a rustic maiden not in her teens but a hash.

Another source of discomfort to a painfully precise old bachelor is unpunctuality; so greatly on the increase. By no means a solitary experience was that at N., where the young vicar, a regular son of Anak, arranged to meet me in his dining-room the following morning precisely at a quarter to eight, to accompany me to early celebration at eight o'clock. I waited in the fireless room as the precious minutes glided by: and at five minutes to eight I was hurried up the steepest of hills to the church, threw on a surplice, and breathless tried to read the exhortation, but halves of sentences came in spasmodic gasps, and I realised the old nightmare of oppressive struggling to shout, and a collapse into a whisper; in fact, I was made thoroughly uncomfortable. Then again, why did that kind-hearted vicar of P. keep me on the worry early last Easter morn by rummaging overhead for the unfindable when the time was nearly up, and I had no oppor-

tunity in the transit of ascertaining a dozen things connected with my part in the service.

Some men are born five minutes late, and never overtake it. Frequently too, am I told overnight, "We will have breakfast exactly at half-past eight, because you must start to the station at nine."

Monday morning comes, I enter the room as the time-piece chimes the half-hour: the fire is scarcely alight; the windows open to admit the hoar frost; the chairs are turned topsy-turvy; the table is bare; the housemaid dusting vigorously. I feel with Paul Pry, "I hope I don't intrude?" not knowing where to stand or sit. Presently the lady rushes in.

"So sorry! can't think how I overslept myself this particular morning: my husband will be down directly: Jane, we won't have prayers; bring in the breakfast; let me see, you like your eggs well set."

Enter husband reading the morning's letters.

"Can't think how it happened, but that clock must be fast; it wants seventeen minutes to nine: where is the tea-caddy?"

The meal is served a few minutes before nine, when my hostess remembers—

"My dear, did you order the carriage for this morning?"

"Yes! but I don't think I mentioned the hour. I say, Jane, just tell Stokes to bring it round at once."

Swindon-like, ten minutes allowed for refreshment; the next ten anxiously waiting in the hall the arrival of Tommy, warranted not to exceed five miles an hour. I hurriedly exchange adieus, not comforted by the assurance, "that train is always late." The road has been relaid in places: the low four-wheel proceeds by snatches and halts, and Tommy does not believe in steam. There are only two trains in the day to B., and the prospect of six hours' penance at the rough shanty called H. station is not exhilarating. Ziz-zag down that last hill, I dread seeing in the distance the line of steam from the advancing train; but no! when we arrive a quarter of an hour late the ticket office is not open. One or two passengers saunter in: a luggager leisurely puffs up and down the single line of rails till pausing to get breath in a siding: and when there is nothing more to be done a happy thought strikes Master Velveteen, who rings a bell, and we are told that our train has actually left the previous stopping-place.

A SWARM OF BEES.

WE had been expecting the thing for weeks, yet, when it did at last happen, it took us by surprise. Forewarned, it would seem, in spite of that well-seasoned proverb, is not always forearmed.

It happened, too, on a most inconvenient day.

The weather, even for June, was unusually warm.

Then the proof-sheets of a certain cherished pamphlet had arrived that morning, and I was very busy making corrections in the coolest and quietest room in the house—my study—when, disregarding my express desire for solitude, in rushed Amanda, and flung herself into my arms, gasping inarticulately.

Her agitation was so great that I refrained from any sign of displeasure at the way in which my papers were scattered and crushed.

"Oh!" she panted, clutching me round the throat so tightly that I felt for one awful moment that my "Essay on Free Labour and the Trades Unions" would never be published—"Oh! they have come out, and are getting into the apple-tree. Make haste—do make haste, and stop them."

"The children getting into the apple-tree?" I shouted. "Why didn't *you* stop them?"

I made haste as directed and hurried towards the garden, but had only reached the door when my Amanda stopped me to say—

"You are even sillier than I thought." (This savoured of a revelation.) "Of course it is not the children, but the bees. O the bees! John started an hour ago to Colehampton Fair—what shall we do?"

I ran towards the apple-tree: there was the swarm flying round it, and forming into a huge cluster, which hung from a branch.

I felt helpless beside their noisy activity, but, collecting my wits, hurried back to the house in search of "Every Man his own Apiarist," and "Bee-keeping for Amateurs."

I had barely reached the door when Amanda, who had been watching from a safe distance, shrieked, "There they go, they are off again!" and fled to the back regions to call Betty.

I remained glued to the spot with horror, as they went over into the next garden, but I was destined to receive even greater shocks.

From my elegant little bijou residence, as my landlord sweetly describes it, emerged two such beings as I could never have dreamt of seeing there. An enormous sun-bonnet graced the head of the first, over which was drawn her entire over-skirt; the second sported my Sunday hat, which covered her head and face, being tilted up at intervals to allow its wearer to use her eyes: over this a large kitchen-

apron was fastened, the rest of the get-up in both cases was quite in keeping. One carried the dinner-gong which she thumped loudly with a heavy hammer; the other performed an equally deafening tattoo with one of my priceless bronzes on a kitchen tray.

It was in vain I challenged them, it was impossible to hear a human voice above the din, and I had to stand back; as the figure in the silk hat raised it for an instant, I recognised to my horror my wife!

They marched without hesitation, apparently inspired by their deafening clamour, straight to the garden wall over which the bees had disappeared, and the heroine in the sun-bonnet, to my utter disgust and consternation, placed a ladder against it and went over; my dainty and usually somewhat helpless Amanda followed her under my very eyes.

"My love," I shouted, "the Wilsons' garden! you are surely not going into it—and like that!"

I might as well have whispered to an express train; they had gone over; and being left alone, I, too, scaled the wall and looked over.

The bees were again in a cluster, this time on the branch of a choice French rose lately planted by my neighbour, a botanical maniac. Beside it stood my wife and servant, beating violently as before.

Down the path came the whole family of Wilson, followed by their household, the head of the house tearing his hair at sight of the precious standard. I fancied I caught sentences such as "unwarrantable intrusion," "disgraceful commotion," "police;" but neither apiarist deigned the slightest attention, and the overpowering noise of their weapons protected them.

Finally the indignant crowd was forced to disperse. I beckoned wildly to my neighbour, in hopes of being able to explain and apologise, but in vain; nothing could be heard, and I was about to descend and forcibly remove my wife, at least, when the beating suddenly ceased, and after a short parley with Betty, Amanda came towards the ladder, climbing up a tasteful rockery to reach the top of the wall.

She stopped at sight of me.

"That is just like you," she said, her remark developing into a shout as Betty again commenced beating the gong, "just like you to sit there and watch while I kill myself getting the bees to settle. Who will eat the most honey, I wonder? Will you go into the garden and beat this tray, or go to the village and get young Simmonds to come and take them? Quick, choose! there is no time to waste: we must take them, or they may be off again."

Of two evils always choose the least.

"I will go to the village," I said.

"Go then," she cried, "here is your hat;" and such an influence has woman over man, that I instantly went, and had reached the

Simmonds' house before I realised, helped thereto considerably by the astonished gaze of the entire community, that I had come out without a coat, and in my silk hat!

I have never been respected in the village since. Some say I am mad, and others——it is too painful.

To fetch Simmonds home and see him coolly enter the Wilsons' garden, carrying the patent hive which I handed to him, was the work of the next half-hour. I understand that when bees swarm any such trespass is allowable—so Amanda says. Betty and John are her authorities, but I call it impertinence.

I went into my house, for my throat was so dry I had scarcely been able to speak to Simmonds, and was just about to enjoy a well-earned glass of cider, when the cry of my helpless little ones smote my ear.

With the gloomiest forebodings I rushed to the garden, following the direction of the cries, and found the baby, who had been crawling on the grass when the bees came out, with his head through the lattice-work of the summer-house.

The lattice is small and the baby's head large, and it was some time before I could release him; having done so I carried him, still screaming, into the house, and succeeded in pacifying him with a cake and all the drawing-room ornaments at hand. My search for the nurse was useless, as this woman, who is afflicted with "nerves," had had the audacity to retire to a neighbour's house in a fit of hysterics on seeing the bees. This I learned afterwards.

Meanwhile I searched the house, and was rewarded by finding our eldest hope, aged three, employing his leisure in drawing representations of men, dogs and horses, in the highest style of nursery art, on some loose sheets of paper which strewed the floor.

There were more howls after that. As I collected my spoiled proof-sheets I do not know whether Dicky or I made the most noise.

Depositing both children in safety on a plot of grass, I again mounted the ladder, and looking over, was astounded to see a crowd, principally of children and old people, collected in the paddock which bounded my neighbour's garden. Mr. Wilson and the police were trying to disperse them, for some time with small success. They had heard the sound of melody from their houses, and came to listen, as they hoped, to a brass band, a rare treat in our isolated village. Although at first disappointed, they were good-natured enough to take a lively interest in our proceedings, and it was not until Simmonds shook the bees skilfully into the hive and covered them up, and, heaving a great sigh, exclaimed, "Them'll do now," it was not till then, I say, that the spectators retired, leaving my wife at last free to return to her ordinary occupations.

I was thankful to observe that she no longer thought it necessary to climb over the rockery, but walked round to the gate like a reasonable being.

I went round to meet her, and overheard Wilson, who looked quieter now, telling the policeman that he had changed his mind, and did not intend to send me a summons, as he found his trees quite uninjured. In answer to my apologies he said that he was willing for this once to overlook the inconvenient disturbances of the morning, and we parted on fairly good terms.

Peace and harmony reigned again, and I could scarcely have realised that I had not been suffering from nightmare, had I not been convinced by the dilapidated state of the gong and Amanda's tears over the Dresden broken by the baby. My bronze inkstand too was missing, and cannot be traced.

Taking it all round I began to think we were paying rather dearly for our honey, and was just about to confide this view of the case to Amanda, who, with infinite patience and "coaguline" was patching up a still smiling little shepherdess, when Betty ran in almost crying.

"Oh, sir! ma'am! the bees be gone again. Simmonds left them all right, and now there is not one left, and he met a boy who saw a swarm an hour ago over to Farmer Withycombe's, so they'll perhaps be gone miles by now. 'Tis a terrible pity."

It was but too true, and though the faithful Simmonds wearied body and mind in the subsequent search, our swarm is still missing.

I suggested to Amanda, over the tea-cups, that in future, bees being so troublesome and expensive, we should depend for our honey on more fortunate or more experienced bee-keepers, but Amanda shook her head and was silent; and I know what that means.

Norah M'Cormick.

TOM PUCKLE: THE COMMONPLACE.

ACCORDING to a well-known writer the man who has best served his generation is not the man who has done the most "good," or the man who has set the finest moral example, but the man who has made the most happiness for his neighbour. So, in presenting Tom Puckle to the public I make no apology for his one talent of good-nature. I have called him commonplace, and so he was; commonplace in appearance, with his dumpy figure and seraphic smile; and commonplace in mind to judge from the monotony of his conversation, and his ever ready interest in petty topics. Perhaps it was a clear case of circumstances making the man, for his life had been very uneventful.

"You have no heart line!" a pretty palmist told him at one of those dull drawing-room "crushes," when everyone talks to the wrong person or is absorbed in watching his opportunity of escape.

"Perhaps somebody has effaced it for me!" he answered, laughing into her blue eyes; and she made up her mind that whatever people said about his stupidity he was equal to as good a flirtation as any man.

But that was not one of his pastimes; he always declared he was much too busy arranging others' love-affairs to have any of his own. People involuntarily confided in him, and thrust upon him the most risky situations. Anxious mothers implored him to find out the morals of every aspirant to their daughters' hands; and love-sick hysterical boys paced his room half the night in frenzied suspense or despair. At the age of forty he was still living in two rooms without a relative in the world to claim his society. He was a commercial man, and his income of five hundred pounds a year covered his expenses and left him at the end of each without a debt; but his worst enemy, if he had one, never called him mean, he had never been known to desert a friend or to fail in helping the lame dog over the stile. He gave his little dinners and whist parties, and was a popular diner out.

"A table wants as much padding as anything else," he used to say with his good-natured smile, "and people are so kind they always call upon me to make up their number."

This is just what he thought had happened to him one night at the Barrows. His place was in the middle of a long table between two of the plainest old prims he had ever seen. Before the dinner was half over he found he was in the same predicament as the man who couldn't open his mouth without putting his foot into it. Their severe glances and stiff narrowing of the shoulders denounced him for the world, the flesh, and the devil; and he was not at all sure when

he nearly choked himself over a joke he happened to catch from the far end of the table that they did not think him intoxicated.

What was his consternation, then, the next morning when he got into an omnibus in Piccadilly to find he encountered them again, and to overhear such remarks as—"Here comes that horrid little man!" "Nasty little fright, I hope he won't sit next to me!" So he sat opposite to them with a miserably dejected look on his fat, rosy face, till the charity of one of them prompted her to jerk out her hand and her recognition,

"Did we not have the pleasure of meeting you last night?"

"Delighted to see you again," he beamed. "Can I be of any service to you?"

There was a passage of whispers, and at last a piece of paper was put into his hands bearing an address.

"West Kensington is a very perplexing locality," he said; "you'd better let me conduct you there."

More passage of whispers and it was agreed.

He got on capitally after that, and found all the right things to say.

They stopped at Edith Road, and each accepting an arm, the little ladies were piloted across the road.

"Now kind Mr. Puckle," one of them said, "we will tell you we are going to see a niece of ours who is in terrible trouble, and we may have to bring her away with us. Is there a cab to be got about here at a minute's notice?"

Puckle thought for a moment; he was used to these emergencies, and he made up his mind to act in this one.

"I'll tell you what," he said, "the best plan will be for me to get a cab and wait for you a few doors down the road, then there won't be any difficulty. Where are you going to drive to?"

"We are lodging in Sloane Square."

"All right. Here we are, Lisgar Gardens; which is your number? Very well, I'll be ready."

After some difficulty he got a cab, and drove up quickly to the spot; but there was no sign of the little ladies, and he got through two cigars before he saw the door open. The girl was with them, thickly veiled, but he saw she walked firmly towards him and bent her head a little proudly as she gave him the bag she carried. He shut the door after them, and was lifting his hat when the little women fluttered out,

"Oh, Mr. Puckle, if you *would* come too! Cabs are so dangerous!"

"By all means," he answered, jumping in and sitting next to the girl.

"Is it not taking up this gentleman's time, Aunt Deborah?" she said in a low voice that sounded strangely sweet to him.

"I've nothing in the world to do," he replied quickly; "it will fill up my morning for me."

They drove in silence. And he was certain that the girl at his side was suffering acutely ; her hand was pressed continually to her side, and once as they rattled over some stones he heard her groan.

"You are not well," he said kindly, and before they knew what he was about he had slipped off his overcoat and rolled it into a pillow for her.

"If I could only get more air," she gasped, hurrying off her gloves and throwing up her veil. He dashed down the window, regardless of Aunt Deborah's cough, and he noticed two things, that the girl was very beautiful and that she wore a wedding-ring.

"We are nearly there now," he said; "I am afraid you are suffering?"

She gave him a quick, scrutinising look.

"You are very kind," she answered, and closed her eyes.

Aunt Deborah, who always took the initiative, leant forward and whispered:

"She has been travelling night and day alone and in dreadful trouble."

"Poor child," he said gently ; "poor child."

He helped them out and half carried the girl into the house. When they had laid her on the sofa he withdrew, asking to be allowed to call the next day. Miss Deborah still retained his hand.

"I don't know what to do," she said. "Mr. Barrow is out of town and we have no male relative."

"Let me help you if I can," he answered ; "if you can trust me?"

"Yes, yes, I'm sure we can ; but you are a stranger. We are trespassing."

"Please don't think that: I never was a stranger to anybody. Tom Puckle is a stupid fellow, I know, but he has mixed with the world long enough to know its ways."

"Come in here, then," she said, opening a side door that led into their little dining room. She talked and cried for half an hour, poor Miss Deborah, she was such a tender-hearted soul. And he would not hurry her a bit. He tried to get a clear idea of the case, and what he made out was that when the child was born the father had basely deserted his wife and had not been heard of for months.

"She stayed in Canada as long as her money held out, but when the baby died there was nothing for it but to come back to us, and by the kindness of her friends she managed to scrape the money together for her passage. We did not know it was so bad as all this till this morning."

Aunt Deborah sobbed.

He took her hand gently between his.

"Try and tell me," he said, "the name of this dev——man, and how long he has been at this place."

"He is a Captain Sparrow, but I don't know anything about his ship or that."

It was little to go upon, but Tom Puckle was not easily baulked.

He came every evening and brought a wonderful cheer with him. Daisy Sparrow began to look upon his visit as the one bright spot in the dreary day, and she would sit watching his ugly, kind face till her own would brighten for the passing moment. He took them for drives in the parks, and he brought her the first red roses of the summer. She held them for a minute close to her breast and kissed them passionately. Puckle's eyes filled, and there was an odd sensation about his heart.

"You are fond of flowers," he said; "or do they only bring you painful memories?"

She laid them down and blushed a little.

"No, I have no sentimental associations with flowers. I only love them for themselves, and because they seem full of the kindness of the world, and I have never had very much." She held out her hand. "But you are the kindest man I ever met."

"Oh, am I really?" he said foolishly, and he laughed as he pressed her hand and took his leave. He walked home feeling charged with electricity. But when he had sent away his dinner and drank an extra glass of wine he grew serious, and a guilty look came into his simple blue eyes.

"This won't do, Tom!" he ejaculated, pulling himself together. "If you fall in love with that girl there'll be the deuce to pay."

He began to wish she had not got such sweet, pathetic eyes, and quite such a thrilling voice. Perhaps it would be better not to think of her at all. Then he remembered she had expressed a wish to read a book he had mentioned, and he took down his hat again and went out to buy it.

One day he told them he was going away on business and might not be back for some days. It was the end of the autumn and Daisy was sitting shivering over the fire. She looked up quickly with troubled eyes.

"Oh, must you go? We shall miss you so much. And I am going away so soon myself."

"Daisy!" the little ladies cried.

"Yes, dear aunts, I can't live for ever on your charity, I must find something to do."

"Will you wait till I come back," he asked, "before you take any decided step? I may bring you some news."

"Are you going on my account?" she cried, springing to her feet. "You shall not! Let him send for me if he wants me. I won't go until he does!" she added fiercely.

Tom Puckle started, and then he came quite close to her and looked in her eyes.

"Did not you *love* him once?"

She shuddered.

"Never; I married him to save my only brother from ruin."

"And he?"

"Is dead."

There was a long silence. Then she said, and she was very pale:

"What have you heard? Tell me everything."

"Your husband is most likely on his way to England. I am going to Southampton to meet the vessel that he is supposed to be sailing in. Can you trust me absolutely?"

"Absolutely!"

The next day she received a telegram—"*Your husband is dying. He does not ask for you.*" But of course she went. A woman's sense of duty is stronger than she imagines. And trembling little Aunt Deborah followed by the next train.

"*Our* Mr. Puckle would take care of her, I know," she said to her sister, "but one must consider what the world is likely to say."

All was over when she got there. Handsome, reckless, selfish George Sparrow would never trouble his fellow-sinners again.

"The wicked are only poor blind people who have missed their way," somebody says. But, as a critic marked the other day against a passage in Stevenson's 'Christmas Sermon,' before lending it to me, "A. has as good a right to go to the devil as we to go to glory." "Yes," wrote my friend, "if he goes *alone*." That is just the rub.

Captain Sparrow did not leave his wife a penny, and Tom Puckle paid the hotel bill and all the expenses of the funeral. In her flurry to take Daisy back with her, Aunt Deborah did not think about it, and the girl took them all by surprise when she met him on his return with a ten-pound note in her hand.

"I have sold my jewels," she said; "is this enough to pay you?"

He drew back, hurt to the quick.

"Oh, she cried, "I did not mean I could pay you for your kindness!"

"But you would deprive me of doing a common duty by a fellow-man."

She crushed the note in her hand and threw it in the fire. He smiled.

"Have you any plans?" he asked her presently.

"Yes; Aunt Deborah's friends, the Barrows, are going to let me teach their children."

"Will that be agreeable?"

"I think so," she answered wearily; "it is better than nothing. I go to-morrow."

"Then this is good-bye," he said, trying to command his voice; "I am going away too. The company are sending me to India for two years."

"Oh, dear Mr. Puckle," the little ladies cried with genuine distress in their voices, "we shall miss your kind, cheery face dreadfully!"

"Thank you," he said, kissing their hands. "And have *you* one word of regret to give me?" he added, turning to Daisy.

She was silent, but she gave him both her hands, and if he had not been so commonplace, poor Tom Puckle, he would have known her silence was the best hope he could have received.

He had been out his two years and was on the verge of returning, when Aunt Deborah, who had written him from time to time sweet, old-fashioned letters, sent him at last the long-expected blow.

"*Daisy is receiving marked attentions from John Woodward, the artist, and the Barrows are delighted. Poor dear child! Maria and I hoped at one time—but old women should not be match-makers, and as I have always told her, you looked upon her just as a father might.*"

Tom groaned. What should he do? It would be unbearable to see her the wife of another again. And yet he must see her once more.

So it was that one evening in the late spring he overtook her in the Park, where he had been directed to follow her, and began at once to congratulate her in his clumsy way.

"Will you never marry, yourself?" she asked, looking through the distant trees.

"I? No! Why, who'd take a commonplace fellow like me? I only look on at these things. Tell me, Daisy, do you love this man with all your heart?"

"No, I don't; and what is more, I have never said I would marry him—he is too intense—I—I prefer something 'commonplace.'"

"Daisy, you don't mean——"

"Yes, I do!" she sobbed, turning her flushed face to his. "I have been so miserable without you—don't leave me again!"

And it was not to be wondered, considering how startled he was, that he took her in his arms then and there and kissed her beautiful lips.

LILIAN STREET.

By the time tea was over, the sisters had discovered that their first and not altogether flattering estimate of Lady Pell was quite an erroneous one.

THE ARGOSY.

JUNE, 1894.

THE GREY MONK.

By T. W. Speight, Author of "The Mysteries of Heron Dyke."

CHAPTER XXII.

FATHER AND SON.

"HE is unworthy of either your love or mine," were Ethel's parting words to Hetty as they stood together in the porch at Rose Mount. With that she drew the other to her and kissed her, and then Hetty went her way with a full heart.

Next day she went back home to Dulminster and recommenced the round of her daily duties, to all outward seeming as if nothing had happened to her. But for her the romance of life was over. In the darkened chamber of her heart she mourned alone over the corpse of her dead love. Some day, in all probability, she would marry; for although her lover had proved false to her, she had no intention of fading into an old maid with no prospect before her beyond that of teaching one generation of children after another. She looked forward to having a home of her own, and a husband to work for her; but, for all that, she did not fail to tell herself that although she would never marry anyone whom she did not like, and even love after a fashion, yet that she could never care for another as she had cared for the man whose vows had been written in water. With the memory of him was associated all the glamour and romance of her young life, which, once gone, can return never more.

On the morning of the day following that of Hetty Blair's call at Rose Mount, Mr. Keymer senior found among his letters one superscribed to his son. Its only post-mark was that of St. Oswyth's. The brewer turned it over more than once, and re-read the address with growing curiosity. "Quite a young lady's hand; my first wife used to write almost exactly like it," he muttered. "It must be from

her—nay, I'm sure it is. In that case I shall be perfectly justified in opening it. The little affair as between Miss Ethel Thursby and my son is one which concerns me as much as, if not more than, it does Launce himself."

Without more ado he took his penknife, slit open the envelope, and extracted the enclosure. "Ah, as I thought. Dated from Rose Mount, that little white cottage on the Shackleford Road where I am told the spinsters have gone to reside since their come-down in the world; and signed 'Ethel Thursby.' I rather expected the young lady would have written long before now. Reproaching him for his silence and all that sort of thing, I don't doubt. Well, well, poor girl, one can't wonder at it. I wish, for all our sakes, that matters had turned out differently. But Providence orders things after its own fashion, and we can but submit."

With that he lay back in his chair and settled his spectacles on his nose. His face was a study as he read.

"If—remembering what passed between you and me only a few hours before you left St. Oswyth's—I were to begin by stating that during the weeks which followed your departure I did not look and expect to hear from you, nor fail to wonder at your unaccountable silence, I should be asserting that which was not the fact.

"I *did* look and expect to hear from you, and was wholly at a loss to understand why I failed to do so. Now, I am no longer at a loss. The motive by which you have all along been actuated has at length been made clear to me. The scales have been plucked from before my eyes.

"From what I now know of you, it is impossible for me any longer to doubt that when you asked me to become your wife, it was not because you cared for me for myself, but because you looked forward to my one day becoming the heiress of my dear aunts. When, however, on the evening of my birthday, you gathered from a certain letter which you were allowed to read that my aunts had lost the greater part of their fortune, you at once made up your mind to snap the chain by which you had bound yourself to me such a little while before. The readiest way of effecting this, as it seemed to you, was to abruptly quit St. Oswyth's a few hours later without informing me of the place for which you were bound, and to maintain an unbroken silence from that time forward.

"I congratulate you on the success which has crowned your efforts.

"But there remains another point connected with the affair about which it is due to myself that I should say something, although it is one the particulars of which you doubtless hoped could by no possibility reach me.

"When you first induced me to promise to become your wife you begged of me to keep our engagement a secret from everyone till you should give me leave to speak of it. It was a request to which I

weakly acceded, although I was made very unhappy thereby. Not that I had the faintest notion of the base advantage which you proposed to take of my silence. But I am ignorant no longer. You were afraid that if the fact of our engagement were made public it might reach the ears of one to whom you were already bound by a solemn promise of marriage. It was not that you cared in the least about your promise; your fear was lest certain compromising letters written by you from time to time might be brought up in judgment against you, and not till an opportunity should offer itself for you to regain possession of them were you willing that your engagement to me should become known.

"The wished-for opportunity came at last, and you, who doubtless would be highly indignant if anyone were to speak of you as other than a gentleman and a man of honour—you condescended to break open and rifle the work-box of her into whose ear, only a few hours before, you had been whispering false vows of love and constancy! But you had your reward; you got back your letters; you had no longer anything to fear, or so you flattered yourself. You hurried back to me and told me smilingly that the need for keeping our engagement a secret no longer existed. I have taken the trouble of writing to you at so much length in order to prove to you that the full measure of your baseness is known to me. How utterly mean and despicable you have become in my eyes, in what utter loathing and contempt I hold you, I leave you to imagine for yourself—and you could scarcely imagine anything that exceeds the reality.

"Ethel Thursby."

The hot colour mounted to Mr. Keymer's face as he read the concluding lines of Ethel's epistle. He had always regarded himself as a man of honour and of the strictest integrity in his dealings with others, as one careful never to overpass that thin line which in but too many instances is all that divides trade morality from that other commodity, often hardly to be distinguished from it, of which the law takes cognisance; but there was that in some of Miss Thursby's phrases which stung him to the quick, not merely on Launce's account, but on his own. When, acting on the information imparted to him that the Miss Thursbys had willed all they possessed to their niece, he had urged his son to endeavour to secure the heiress for his wife; and when, on its being subsequently shown that she was an heiress no longer, he had given a helping hand in the rupture of the engagement—it had seemed to him that he had only acted as any sensible man of the world, who had his son's welfare at heart, would have acted. All at once, however, a fresh and entirely different light had been thrown on his action in the affair, and, for the first time, he seemed to see it in its true colours and to recognise it for the despicable and dishonourable piece of business it really was. The brewer was not used to blushing for himself, or his actions, and the sensation was by no means a pleasant one.

But before long all such unpleasant personal considerations became,

to a great extent, merged in a feeling of annoyed wonder, originating in certain statements in the letter which seemed clearly to implicate his son in some more or less discreditable transactions with some other female, of which he, his father, knew absolutely nothing. Of what folly had Launce been guilty?

Without more ado he at once despatched a brief telegram to his son, who was still sojourning with his uncle in Cornwall: "Return by first train without fail."

Indeed, now that Miss Thursby had rejected Launce of her own accord, there was no valid reason why he should not at once come back home. The engagement had never been made public; neither Miss Thursby nor her aunts would, for their own sakes, care to speak of it, and the whole episode might be regarded as over and done with by all concerned. In so far Miss Thursby's stinging epistle had served to put an end to a state of affairs the climax of which, in any case, could hardly have been devoid of unpleasant features of some kind.

Launce Keymer did not reach home till the afternoon of next day He had been away on a fishing expedition when the telegram arrived and, as a consequence, had missed the last through train to London. He had not found the journey a pleasant one, his father's curt telegram having served to utterly unnerve him. What had happened to cause him to be so peremptorily summoned?

Launce took a cab at the station and drove straight to his father's office. The brewer was alone.

"Anything the matter, dad? All well at home, I hope?" queried Launce as he extended a hand which his father made believe not to see.

"There's a great deal the matter; more, perhaps, than you will find it easy to explain away," responded the brewer gruffly. "Take that chair and read this." As he spoke he took Ethel's letter from under a paper-weight at his elbow and tossed it across the table to his son.

Launce read it to the end without a word. When he had done, he refolded it slowly, and then lifted his eyes and looked at his father, who was grimly watching him.

"Well, sir, what have you to say for yourself?" demanded the latter.

"Nothing much, except to confess that I have made a precious idiot of myself," replied Launce with an uneasy laugh. "Now that matters have come to this pass, I need scarcely say that any questions you may choose to put to me shall be answered truthfully and to the best of my ability."

And so by degrees, and by way of answers to his father's interrogatories, the story of Hetty Blair was told.

"Your conduct has indeed been that of an idiot—no milder term is applicable to it," remarked the brewer when he had brought his string of questions to an end. "That you have been headstrong and extravagant, I have long known—known it to my cost—but that you should have displayed such an utter lack of common sense in your

dealings with this governessing girl, is what I should have found it impossible to believe had not facts, coupled with your own confession, proved to me how utterly mistaken I was. I have lost every atom of confidence in you, and from to-day——"

"It does not follow, because a man has made an egregious ass of himself once, that he must necessarily do so a second time," broke in Launce, a little sullenly. "Indeed, after the lesson I have just had read me, it would be absurd to suppose that I should ever commit myself in a similar way again."

"Not in the same way, perhaps, but in some other way equally as reprehensible. It is only wise men who profit by experience. Fools never learn. In which of the two categories do you assume to class yourself?"

Launce bit his lip, but refrained from replying.

Launce Keymer had scarcely been twenty-four hours at home before the nurse-maid, Doris King, who was under promise to do so, had intimated the fact by letter to Miss Hetty Blair. Other notes followed, in which Hetty was informed that her former lover was going about just as he had been in the habit of doing before he left home, as gay, as smiling, and apparently as free from care as ever he had been. And so, indeed, he was, for Launce never dreamt that Hetty either could or would trouble him further. When all was said and done, he looked upon it that he had escaped handsomely out of both his entanglements, and as the particulars in neither case had come to the knowledge of the little world in which he habitually lived and moved, it seemed to him that he was perfectly at liberty to revert to that pleasant, social, *dégagé* mode of life to which all his inclinations tended, and of which unlimited and irresponsible flirtation formed an essential factor.

Ethel Thursby had said to Hetty: "The service you have done me is greater than you know. Not only have you shown me the kind of man Launce Keymer is, but you have opened my eyes to something else. When he asked me to become his wife it was in the belief that I should one day inherit my aunts' money, but within a few hours of his discovery that they had lost nearly all they were worth and that, consequently, there was no prospect of my inheriting anything, he left home suddenly and without coming to bid me good-bye, and from then till now no word of any kind has reached me from him. The reason of his silence is now made plain to me. He intends me to understand by it that he wishes our engagement to be considered as at an end—and so, indeed, from this hour it is."

These words recurred to Hetty again and again, and the oftener she thought them over the more clearly she saw that, instead of having, as she had hoped and intended, inflicted on her former lover an injury from which he would not readily recover, she had unwittingly rendered him an essent al service by causing Miss Thursby of her own accord to break off an engagement towards the rupture of which he himself had

already taken the first steps. The reflection was a mortifying one, and Hetty ground her sharp white teeth in impotent anger as often as it forced itself upon her. Then, one day, she bethought herself that two of Launce Keymer's letters were still in her possession, which, as breathing a more ardent attachment and being studded with more terms of endearment, she had chosen from the others to place under her pillow at night and help to bring her happy dreams. "If I have failed to make him suffer in the way I intended," she said to herself, "that is all the more reason why I should make him suffer in some other way."

Hetty had flirted with more than one would-be lover before Launce Keymer appeared on the scene and carried all before him. The one she had been most inclined to favour was a young solicitor's clerk, Ambrose Lydd by name. A week seldom went by without their passing each other in the street, and in the glances he cast on her Hetty read clearly enough that he was still no less infatuated with her than he had ever been. To him she now wrote a brief note, asking him to call upon her at her home the first evening he should find himself disengaged.

Three days later Mr. Keymer senior was waited upon by Ambrose Lydd, whose employer had granted him a few hours' leave of absence. The brewer, who was always affable and easy of access to possible customers, having glanced at his visitor's card, which showed him nothing but the other's name, requested him to be seated, and then looked blandly and inquiringly at him; but scarcely had the young solicitor's clerk opened his lips before Mr. Keymer's expression changed in a most remarkable degree.

"I am here to-day, Mr. Keymer, as representing the interests of a certain young lady, by name Miss Hetty Blair. It is a name, sir, that probably is not wholly strange to you."

The brewer considered before answering. He was unable to see that anything would be gained by his denial of any knowledge of the name, while, on the other hand, there was a possibility that his doing so might lead to his detection in a fib, which would be decidedly unpleasant. Besides, he was anxious to learn what lay in the background.

"Really, sir, it is too much to expect that I should charge my memory with every name that may be casually mentioned in my presence," was his cautious reply. "But, assuming that I may at some time or other have heard the name, what then?"

"Merely this, sir: that the lady in question, who resides at Dulminster, was, till some six or seven weeks ago, engaged to be married to your son, Mr. Launce Keymer, a fact of which you are possibly aware."

"I am most certainly unaware of anything of the kind, for the very good reason that no such engagement as you speak of ever existed." There was an angry sparkle in his eyes, but his tone was as dry and

deliberate as ever. "That there may have been some silly harmless flirtation between the two, of a kind common enough among young people, I am willing to admit; but nothing more than that."

"It was very much more than a harmless flirtation, Mr. Keymer, as your son, were he here, would scarcely have the effrontery to deny. It was a formal engagement, duly sanctioned by Miss Blair's mother, at whose house your son was a frequent visitor, and by whom he was looked upon as her daughter's future husband."

"If some old woman chooses to make an ass of herself, that's no concern of mine. I repeat, that the affair, as between my son and Miss Blair, was nothing more than a silly flirtation."

"If that were the case, Mr. Keymer, why should your son have been so terribly anxious to get back certain letters addressed by him to Miss Blair, that he resorted to the extreme step of breaking open her work-box, an act which, had the lady been of a vindictive disposition, might have landed him in a very serious predicament indeed?"

The brewer shrugged his shoulders. "That is a question for my son to answer. And let me tell you, sir, that I am not in the habit of discussing his, or anybody's affairs with strangers; which reminds me that I am still in the dark as to the nature of the business which brought you here."

"Very few words will serve to enlighten you. When your son robbed Miss Blair of her letters he was doubtless under the impression that he had regained possession of all that he had ever written to her. Such, however, was not the case. Miss Blair still retains two letters, both of them couched in language with which it would be impossible to find fault on the score of its ambiguity; in point of fact, they breathe a most fervent devotion, and abound with terms of endearment such as none but accepted lovers are privileged to make use of. Now, sir, there can be little doubt that if Miss Blair chose to enter an action for breach of promise against your son, the letters in question would of themselves go far towards securing her a verdict with heavy damages. But, while determined that the wrong which has been inflicted on her shall not go unpunished, she has no wish to proceed to extremities, unless driven thereto. What, therefore, she has empowered me to do, is to offer to give up the two letters in return for a cheque, signed by you, for three hundred guineas."

"What!" shrieked the brewer, as he sprang to his feet, a patch of purple mantling in either cheek. "Three hundred guineas for a couple of worthless scrawls! What do you take me for? Get out of my office this instant and never let me set eyes on your ugly face again."

Ambrose Lydd did not offer to stir.

"I beg to remark, Mr. Keymer, that I am usually considered to be rather good-looking," he said with a quaint smile; "but in moments of excitement I am aware that we are liable to say things which we afterwards see reason to regret. But to come back to business. The letters in question, sir, if read in open court, as they undoubtedly will be if my

client's very reasonable offer is met by a refusal, will prove to be anything rather than worthless scrawls. I have brought copies of them with me for your perusal. Here they are, sir; read them through carefully, after which, I venture to assert that your opinion as to their worthlessness will be considerably modified."

Speaking thus, the solicitor's clerk produced the copies he had brought with him, and rising, laid them on the brewer's blotting-pad.

Without a word more Mr. Keymer went back to his chair, his face still corrugated with a frown. He was annoyed with himself at having been surprised into a display of temper. Ambrose Lydd watched him keenly while he read the copies, but his features betrayed nothing. When he had come to the end of the second letter, looking Lydd steadily in the face, he said: "Sir, I find that my son is a more egregious ass than I believed him to be. Leave these documents with me, and let me have your address. You shall hear from me in the course of the week."

A few days later Miss Hetty Blair had the satisfaction of opening an account with the Dulminster Banking Company, who placed to her credit a cheque for three hundred guineas which bore the signature of Robert Keymer.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ETHEL'S CONFESSION.

It scarcely needs to be stated that Ethel Thursby's letter to Launce Keymer was written with the full knowledge and sanction of her aunts. When the particulars of her interview with Hetty Blair were told them, they could but hold up their hands in horrified amazement. Their worst fears, never even hinted at to Ethel, had been more than realised; there could no longer be any doubt as to the nature of the motives by which Keymer had been influenced. His treatment of Ethel had been bad enough, but his treatment of Hetty Blair revealed a depth of depravity which caused the gentle hearts of the sisters at once to shiver with affright and glow with thankfulness when they called to mind their darling's narrow escape from being united for life to such a man.

"I little thought I should live to see the day when I could truthfully say, 'I am glad our money has been taken from us,'" remarked Miss Matilda. "But, here and now, I can say it. To the loss of our money we owe it that Ethel is not by this time Mr. Launce Keymer's wife. It was one of those blessings in disguise at which we are prone to cavil because we fail at the time to recognise them for what they really are."

"But we ought not to forget what we owe to Miss Blair in the matter," suggested Miss Jane with that touch of deference due from her as second sister for the time being. "Her revelation would of

itself have more than supplied cause enough for breaking off the match."

"Truly so, sister, if it had reached our ears in time; but we have no proof that it would have done so. Had Mr. Keymer not left home, he would probably have found means to defeat her object, and, in addition, would most likely have pressed for the marriage to take place as early as possible."

"In any case, we can never be sufficiently thankful that matters have fallen out as they have. I declare my nerves are all a-tingle at the thought of what Ethel has escaped."

"And I have dropped my stitch six times since she told us—a thing which never happened to me before."

"I was brought up in the belief that when men were bad—of course I mean very bad indeed—their wicked qualities rarely failed to make themselves apparent in their looks, or their manner, or—or in some other way, so that people of even ordinary discernment could be on their guard against them and not credit them with virtues they could lay no claim to. But Mr. Keymer had always such a pleasant, smiling, indeed, I might almost say fascinating way with him, that it seems difficult to connect him in one's thoughts with the actions of which we are now assured he was guilty."

Miss Jane spoke a little plaintively, like one who had lost another of the few illusions which advancing years had left her.

"I am afraid, sister," answered Miss Matilda, "that this notion of bad people having, as it were, the trade-mark of their evil natures stamped upon them for everybody to see, like many other of the traditions which one picks up in childhood, fails utterly when put to the proof. Mr. Keymer had certainly very pleasant manners and could make himself most agreeable. Yet we have it on Shakespeare's authority that a man 'may smile, and smile, and yet be a villain.'"

Ethel had not been present while the foregoing conversation took place. After imparting to her aunts everything told her by Miss Blair, she had gone to her own room to write the letter which, a little later, was received and opened by Mr. Keymer in his son's absence.

She now came back with the letter open in her hand, and going up to Miss Matilda, said: "Here is what I have written, dear aunt. Please to read it and tell me whether it is quite what you would like me to say."

Miss Matilda took the letter in silence, and when she had read it passed it on to her sister. Miss Jane having read it, also in silence, returned it to her sister, who then cleared her voice and drew herself up a little more stiffly.

"My dear child," she said to Ethel, "after a careful perusal of your epistle, I fail to see the slightest necessity for adding to it, or altering it by so much as a single word. It is severe, but not unduly so considering the circumstances which have given rise to it, and you seem to me to have nowhere overstepped that impalpable boundary

which, be the nature of her communication whatever it may, no gentlewoman who respects herself can afford to ignore."

Here Miss Matilda paused and looked inquiringly at Miss Jane.

"I am in full accord, sister, with all that you have said," remarked the latter in reply to the look. "Considering the peculiar difficulties with which the dear girl had to contend, it seems to me that she has expressed herself quite admirably."

"Quite admirably," echoed Miss Matilda. "Lucidity without verbosity should be the characteristic of all epistolary communications, and I am pleased to find that in this instance, as in so many others, our dear niece has not failed to profit by our teaching." Then to Ethel she said: "You had better post the letter yourself, dear, and then no eyes but your own will have cognisance of the address."

This Ethel deferred doing till later in the day, when another errand would take her into the town. For the present she laid the letter aside and quietly resumed the sewing on which she had been engaged when Miss Blair knocked at the door. She was a shade paler than common, but perfectly composed, as, indeed, she had been when telling the sisters Hetty's news. They now glanced at her and then at each other.

Not for the world would either of the sisters have been willing that their dear girl should imagine their hearts did not bleed for her in her trouble, and yet they felt that her very quietude imposed upon them a certain restraint in the expression of the sympathy they were longing to give vent to. Miss Jane, who was the more romantic of the two and still retained a vivid recollection of several of the heroines of the Rosa Matilda school of fiction on which her fancy had been nourished when a young woman scarcely out of her teens, would have held it to be no more than appropriate if, at the close of her interview with Miss Blair, Ethel had rushed into the sitting-room, her hair unbound and disordered and a frenzied glare in her eyes, and after a few incoherent exclamations, had either swooned right away, or gone off into violent hysterics. All Miss Jane's heroines had been addicted either to swooning or hysterics at the tragic crises of their lives, and that Ethel had failed to follow so proper an example was just a trifle disappointing.

To Miss Matilda it seemed that the sooner Ethel was encouraged to open her heart and seek from others that sympathy which, when we know it to be genuine, rarely fails to carry with it some measure of comfort, the better it would be for her. "And yet," she added to herself by way of after-thought, "it is not expected of the patient that he should probe his own wounds; it rests with others to do that. Just as likely as not, the dear girl wonders and feels hurt because neither my sister nor I by as much as a word have led her on to unbosom herself to us. She is evidently waiting for me to speak, and yet how to begin, or what to say, I know not."

She let her hands drop on her lap with a faint sigh. Her thimble

fell unheeded on the floor. She was sitting by one of the two open windows and her gaze strayed out into the sunlit garden, while there came into her face a look of such perplexity and distress that Ethel, glancing up from her seat by the other window and seeing it, felt a sudden gush of pity and remorse.

Dropping her work, she rose and crossing quickly to the other window, drew a footstool close up to her aunt and sat down on it. Then taking one of Miss Matilda's still pretty hands, she held it closely.

"Dear aunt," she said, "I know that both you and Aunt Jane must think me a strange, cold, heartless girl because I seem so little affected by what has been told me to-day. And yet I feel it, although not perhaps in the way you think I ought to do. That, however, I cannot help. I am very much afraid that I shall shock you when I assure you that the breaking off of my engagement to Mr. Keymer comes as a positive relief to me. But you have taught me that the truth should never be hidden, and that *is* the truth. Now that I look back, it seems to me as if I could never have really cared for him as I have heard and read of other girls caring for those to whom they were engaged. Almost from the first moment of giving him my promise something whispered to me that I had made a mistake. I would have recalled it if I could, but I was too much of a coward to do so. I told myself that I was fickle and inconstant and did not know my own mind, and that love would grow and increase as time went on. Whether it would or no, I cannot tell. I was certainly pained by Mr. Keymer's unaccountable silence. None of us like to feel ourselves neglected, and that was how I felt. And yet, while looking every day for a letter, my heart always gave a little bound when the postman, on his last round, failed to bring me one, and I knew that I was safe till the morrow. For all along a consciousness was working within me against which I vainly strove, that should a letter come, pressing that an early date might be fixed for my marriage, I should shrink from the prospect with something akin to terror, and what would then have happened I cannot tell. Now the necessity is one that will never have to be faced."

She paused and again pressed Miss Matilda's hand to her cheek.

"And now, dear aunt," she resumed, "you will perhaps understand better than ever before what a strange, inconsistent creature I am, brimful of contradictions which sway me this way and that and make me a puzzle to myself. Well, I have had my—my love experience, if I may call it so." An involuntary sigh fluttered from her lips. "And, dear aunts—both of you," she went on after an almost imperceptible pause, "I pray you to believe me when I say that it has left no wound behind it which time will not quickly heal. From to-day I shall be once more your own Ethel and no one shall ever come between us again."

It was one of those sweet, high-flown promises which young people

make with every intention of keeping them, but which, five times out six, after-events laugh to scorn.

Ethel rose without a word more, and having pressed a tender kiss on Miss Matilda's faded cheek, would have gone, but the spinster detained her.

"My dear child," she said, "my sister and I cannot but feel gratified at your having chosen to open your heart to us in the way you have; but, indeed, it was not likely that the Ethel we have known and loved from childhood should be otherwise than open and straightforward as the day. As long as you live you will have cause to feel thankful that you have escaped becoming the wife of Mr. Launce Keymer, whose name from this hour shall be banished from our lips. And now, dear one, run away and keep your flowers company for half-an-hour before tea is brought in. The day has been a most trying one for you and the fresh air will do you good."

Before leaving the room Ethel crossed to Miss Jane and kissed her as she had her sister. "Heaven bless you, sweet one!" said the spinster fervently. Then, in a low voice, she added: "When I was as young as you are now *I* loved some one who deserted me for another. At the time I thought my heart would have broken—but it did not."

Ethel quitted the room like one walking in her sleep.

Aunt Jane, a love-lorn maiden of eighteen! It was a picture which so took her imagination that for the time she forgot all about herself and her own affairs. No thought that perhaps in years gone by, before she, Ethel, was born, Cupid might have winged one of his shafts at the heart of either of her aunts had ever entered her mind, or that they might have loved, and rejoiced, and suffered in the way so many of their sex are fated to do. To her, her aunts had always been the same sweet, faded, but wholly lovable middle-aged ladies they were to-day. Of late years the silver threads among their hair, and the fine lines marked by Time's etching needle on their placid expanse of brow and around the corners of their eyes might have become a little more observable; but that was all. And to think that behind Aunt Jane's calm exterior, and a soft serenity of manner which was like that of some gracious autumnal day, lay hidden the embers—long since extinct, it was true—of one of those too common love episodes (tragedies they might in many instances be termed) which culminate on one side in vows foresworn, and on the other in a heartache so extreme that till the soft hand of time brings some relief, death itself seems the only possible cure! Aunt Jane had gone through all this. How strange and wonderful it seemed!

On her way upstairs she had paused at the landing window, scarcely knowing that she did so, so deep in thought was she, and there Tamsin, coming out of one of the upper rooms, presently found her.

"Youth and day-dreams go together," said the old woman. "Age has no day-dreams, and all its pictures belong to the long ago."

Ethel, who had heard no footsteps, started at the sound of her voice.

"But I was not day-dreaming—quite the contrary," she returned. "I was thinking about something which was told me a few minutes ago —something the like of which I had never imagined." Then, with a low sigh, she added: "Day-dreams and I have parted company for a long, long time to come, maybe for ever."

"What wicked words are those from one who is in love and engaged to be married! Fie upon you, child!"

"But I am not in love, indeed I am not, Tamsin! Nor have I ever been; I only fancied I was; but my eyes have been opened. And I am no longer engaged to be married."

"Sakes alive! dearie! What has happened?"

"A great deal has happened—much that seems almost too incredible for belief. All is over between Mr. Keymer and me. I have heard that about him to-day which at once puts an end to our engagement—and I have already written to tell him so."

"Now, Heaven be praised for that!" ejaculated Tamsin fervently. "You know I never liked him, and that I mistrusted him from the first moment I set eyes on him. Glad I am that all is over between you! It was not my place to speak when I knew you had given him your promise, but times and again I said sadly to myself, 'Surely, surely my rosebud was never intended for such a man as Mr. Launce Keymer!' Not once, but twenty times have I prayed on my bended knees that something might happen to stop your marriage. And now you tell me that my prayer has been answered. Oh, child, child! not for years has my old heart been gladdened as you have gladdened it this day."

Next moment Ethel's arms were round Tamsin's neck, and she was crying softly on her shoulder. Her full heart could hold no more.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TAMSIN SPEAKS HER MIND.

And so the days and weeks went by, and by general consent Launce Keymer's name was never mentioned at Rose Mount.

It was not owing to any lack of invitations that Ethel scarcely went anywhere that summer, but simply because of late she had lost all desire to do so. It is true that the Lovibonds and the Delaports and one or two other families at whose houses she had heretofore been a welcome visitor, nowadays saw fit to omit her name from the lists of those invited to their garden-parties and other festivities, but the major part of her friends were guilty of no such forgetfulness. To them her changed fortunes (for she could no longer be regarded as the heiress she once had been) made no apparent difference, and it was entirely her own fault that they saw so little of her.

But although Ethel chose to go scarcely anywhere, she was not without friends of her own age who came to seek her out in her self-imposed solitude and retail to her the very latest items of local gossip, consisting, as is usual in such cases, of a pretty equal admixture of fact and fiction. Thus it was that she came to learn of the violent quarrel which had taken place between Mr. Launce Keymer and his father, and of how the latter had cut down his son's allowance of three hundred a year to a pound a week. As a matter of course, a dozen different versions were afloat as to the origin of the quarrel, but, in reality, the facts of the case seemed to be known to no one except the two people concerned. Almost immediately afterwards Launce had left the town, and among all his intimates there was not one who professed to know where he had gone, or what had become of him.

All this was recounted to Ethel as a piece of news which would be likely to interest her as one who had known Launce Keymer and had met him several times in society in the course of the previous summer and winter. There was no faintest suspicion in the narrator's mind, so carefully had the secret of Ethel's brief engagement been kept, that for the latter her news might have an interest very different from any that she imagined.

When Ethel assured Miss Matilda that the wound from which she was suffering was one which time would quickly heal, she stated no more than she felt to be the fact. Between her and the man whose wife she had promised to become, everything was at an end ; and although the relief was great—greater perhaps than she was aware of—she yet felt as if there was a void in her inner life which had never been there before. Her heart was empty. The doors of the temple were shut and the flame of the altar, which, truth to tell, had been of the frailest and feeblest, had been blown suddenly out. But Ethel turned away from brooding over the past and set her face resolutely towards the future.

And so the summer wore on until the crown of it was turned and autumn was drawing on apace. It was Tamsin, whose eyes were ever keen where her darling was concerned, who was the first to notice that the wild-rose tints of Ethel's cheeks were paling to the delicate ivory of the lily. She watched her closely for several days without saying a word to anyone. At length she made up her mind to speak. It was Miss Jane's month, and to her she went.

"The child will just end by moping herself into a decline," said the sturdy dame after a few preliminary remarks. "Look at her cheeks —not a morsel of colour left in 'em, but just as if it had all been washed out. And then, her appetite ! I've watched her at meal-times, and she hardly eats more than enough to keep a canary alive. And when did she sing last, pray, without being asked—she that used to be as merry as a thrush about the house and needed no asking at all? And her laugh that used to do one's heart good to hear—that's dead and buried. Whoever hears it nowadays ?"

"But what is to be done, Tamsin?" pleaded Miss Jane, thoroughly frightened by the picture the old woman had drawn. "Where is a remedy to be found?"

"That is hardly for me to say, Miss Jane. But if Miss Ethel were a niece of mine, I'm pretty clear what I would do."

"And what would that be, Tamsin? You know that my sister and I are always pleased to listen to your suggestions."

"I should take her right away to the seaside, or to some place where she's never been before. It's change the girl wants. At her age they all need it. It's only when folk get elderly that they grow loth to leave their own chimney-corner. Young birds always want to try their wings; and to young folk it always seems as if there must be something better on the far side of the hill than on the side their eyes are used to."

"But the expense," faltered Miss Jane. "My sister and I have very little money by us, and our next dividends will not be due till the new year. And at the seaside one is robbed so terribly—at least, that is what *we* term it—although *they*, no doubt, call it by a different name."

Tamsin was running her fingers along the bottom of her apron in a sort of diffident way altogether unusual with her. "If it's only a question of expense, Miss Jane, that can soon be got over," she said. "As it happens, I've a matter of sixty pounds put away in the savings bank, not a penny of which will ever be the least bit of use to me—having neither chick nor child to leave it to. Take it, Miss Jane; it has been saved up out of the wages paid me by you and your sister. Take it and give the poor child the holiday she needs so sorely."

Rarely had Jane Thursby looked more distressed and perturbed than she did just then, and yet in her cheeks there was a delicate flush which for the passing moment made her seem almost a girl again.

"How dare you, Tamsin, even to hint at such a thing!" she exclaimed in a voice which she vainly strove to render severe.

Then her lips began to tremble and a moisture shone in her eyes. Turning suddenly and laying a hand on each of Tamsin's shoulders, she said with a quaver in her voice: "You foolish but generous-hearted creature, cannot you see—cannot you understand how impossible it is that my sister and I should accept any such offer?"

"No, Miss Jane, with all deference to you, I can neither see nor understand why it should be so. The money was yours to begin with, and if you don't have it before, it will come back to you when I'm dead and gone. I arranged that with Lawyer Tullock half a year agone. It's only a trifle, I know, but it's enough to pay for a month or two at the seaside; and to what better use could it be put, I should like to know, than in helping to bring back the roses to Miss Ethel's cheeks. So do you and Miss Matilda just put your pride in your pocket and take it with an old woman's blessing!"

"Oh no, we cannot, we cannot—God bless you all the same!" cried Miss Jane. "Of course I shall at once consult my sister, but I feel quite sure that in such a matter her sentiments will thoroughly coincide with my own."

Two vivid spots of red flamed out in Tamsin's cheeks. "And can you and Miss Matilda reconcile it to your consciences to sit down with folded hands and watch the poor child grow thinner and paler with every day that breaks, when the means by which health and strength might be given back to her are within your reach?" demanded the old woman in accents such as Miss Jane had never before heard from her lips. "Can you doubt the child was lent you so as to bring a sunshine into your lives which, but for her, you would never have known? And can you doubt that one day an account will be demanded of you by the Lender? When that day comes, what will your answer be?"

Without a word more Tamsin turned on her heel and flinging her apron up to her face, a sure sign that she was deeply moved, walked slowly out of the room, leaving Miss Jane like one petrified.

Miss Matilda happened to be from home at the time, but she had not been five minutes in the house before her sister was pouring into her ears an account of the morning's interview.

"Nothing could justify Tamsin in speaking to you as she did," said Miss Matilda with a highly offended air, when Miss Jane had come to an end. "It was most reprehensible on her part. She knows that she is privileged and she presumes on the fact. I agree with you that it is quite out of the question that we should accept her offer."

"But what if the dear girl is really pining and losing her appetite, as Tamsin states?" queried Miss Jane.

"Even in that case, it is impossible that we should make use of her money. Some other way must be found. But let us first satisfy ourselves that Tamsin is not alarming herself and us unnecessarily."

Accordingly for the next two days the sisters kept silent but unobtrusive watch over Ethel, a fact wholly unsuspected by her.

On the forenoon of the third day, Ethel being out of earshot in the garden, said Miss Jane to her sister: "I am greatly afraid that Tamsin was fully justified in what she said to me about the dear girl. Her appetite has certainly failed her, she moves languidly about the house, and has lost all, or nearly all, that sunny vivacity and liveliness of disposition which used to be one of her greatest charms. We must have been very blind, sister, not to have noticed all this for ourselves."

"It certainly seems strange that we failed to do so," returned Miss Matilda. "But the change in her has been so gradual as to be all but imperceptible, especially to us who are in the habit of seeing her from hour to hour every day of our lives. And besides"—with a sigh—"we have had so many things of late to engage our attention

and occupy our thoughts. Still, I admit that it ought not to have been left for Tamsin to see and point out the change."

"Now that we have satisfied ourselves that there is a change, the question remains, what steps ought we, or can we, take in order to remedy it?"

"Tamsin's offer is not to be thought of. On that point my mind is made up. We must devise some other plan. Let us think."

Whenever Miss Matilda made use of this formula her sister knew that it was intended to apply to the speaker alone, for it was tacitly admitted between the sisters that Miss Matilda was the stronger-minded of the two, and that in all matters of doubt or difficulty her decision should be accepted as final. And Miss Jane was quite content that it should be so. Her knowledge of her own deficiencies awoke no slightest feeling of bitterness in her breast; rather indeed, was she proud of having a sister whose powers of mind and force of character were so superior to her own.

So now, during the silence that ensued, she cheerfully left it to her sister to mentally evolve a way out of the difficulty in which they found themselves, never for a moment doubting that she would succeed in doing so.

Ten minutes might have gone by when Miss Matilda, looking up from her work and pausing with her needle in mid-air, said: "I see one way, and only one, out of our difficulty."

"Yes?" remarked her sister tentatively.

"And that is to obtain a loan of fifty pounds on the security of our mother's jewellery (which is good, but old-fashioned), and the silver tea and coffee service given us by Uncle Henry on our twenty-first birthday."

"O Mattie, what a desecration!" exclaimed Miss Jane, her under-lip beginning to quiver as it always did when she was much moved.

"Desecration! I fail to understand you, sister."

"In having to pawn dear mamma's jewels."

"No such idea entered my mind. What I said was, that we should endeavour to obtain a loan on them in conjunction with the service. It seemed to me that Mr. Daykin, the banker, who has known us ever since we came to St. Oswyth's, would perhaps not object to advance the sum I have named on my frankly explaining to him the purpose for which we require it."

"That of course would make all the difference. And certainly Mr. Daykin has always treated us very nicely; besides which, he looks the personification of benevolence."

"So did that elderly man who called at Vale View last year with a forged letter of introduction and obtained twenty pounds from us, and yet turned out to be nothing but a common impostor. I merely recall the fact as a proof that it is not safe to rely upon looks alone as an index of character. But that has nothing to do with Mr. Daykin, whom I believe to be a thoroughly good and kind-hearted man."

"Still, it will not be a pleasant errand on which to go to him."

"That cannot be helped. In this life duty and inclination by no means always go hand in hand."

"When do you purpose calling on him?"

"Some time in the course of to-morrow."

"Of course I shall accompany you."

"Thank you all the same, sister, but I think I should prefer to go alone. Five minutes will suffice for all I have to say to Mr. Daykin, and less than that for his answer. I shall take the jewels with me and one or two pieces of the service, just enough to enable him to estimate the value of the whole."

Miss Jane felt inwardly relieved at the thought of not having to face the banker on such an errand, while reproaching herself for not insisting that it was her bounden duty to accompany her sister.

CHAPTER XXV.

LADY PELL.

As soon as luncheon was over next day Miss Matilda prepared to set out on her self-imposed errand. Miss Jane had again offered to go with her and her offer had again been declined. A parcel had been made of the jewellery and one or two pieces of plate, which Tamsin would carry for her mistress as far as the door of Mr. Daykin's bank, but neither she nor Ethel was aware of what the contents consisted.

Miss Matilda, with rather a sad heart it must be confessed, was in the act of putting on her out-door things when from the window of her room she saw a pair-horse brougham draw up at the garden-gate, from the box of which a powdered footman presently alighted, and after speaking to someone inside the carriage, opened the gate and entered the tiny demesne. A few seconds later the cottage resounded with a rat-a-tat loud enough to have awakened the seven sleepers. The door was opened by Tamsin, while Miss Matilda ceased her preparations pending the explanation of an incident so strange and unusual.

Presently Miss Jane in person burst into the room in what for her was a state of unwonted excitement.

"Lady Pell—here's her card—is desirous of an interview with one, or both of the Misses Thursby on a matter of business, and the footman is waiting at the door for an answer," she exclaimed in a breath. "I never heard her name before—did you, sister? and what can the business be she wants to see us about?"

"That is a question I am no more able to answer than you are," responded Miss Matilda, who was not so readily flustered as Miss Jane; "but a few minutes will doubtless serve to enlighten us. Will you send word by the man that both of us are at home and shall be

pleased to see her ladyship. I will follow you downstairs in a couple of minutes."

When, three minutes later, Lady Pell entered the little sitting-room the sisters saw before them a woman considerably taller than either of themselves; thin, but not unusually so, and carrying herself with an uprightness that would have done credit to a grenadier. In age she might be anything between sixty and seventy. She had Roman features of a pronounced type which time had served to accentuate, so that it was now difficult to realise that she had ever been accounted handsome. There had always been a certain masculine element about her, more seeming, perhaps, than real, which was not lessened by a faint suspicion of a moustache which, in certain lights, could be seen to shade her upper lip. She was richly but soberly dressed, as became a person who in her day had filled the distinguished position of London's Lady Mayoress.

"My card will have told you who I am," she began, addressing herself smilingly to Miss Matilda, who was wearing the heavy gold chain which marked her as occupying for the time the position of elder sister. "For the present I am staying with my friends at Foljambe Court, and my business here is to see you with reference to Vale View House, which is to let, and which, I am told, is your property. I was directed in the first instance to a house agent's in the town, but I prefer to deal with principals whenever I find it possible to do so."

All this was spoken rapidly in the clear staccato tones of one who was in the habit of making herself heard in whatsoever company she might be.

"Will you not be seated?" It was Miss Matilda's soft voice, in marked contrast to Lady Pell's, which preferred the request.

Lady Pell sat down on the nearest chair, while the sisters seated themselves side by side on the sofa opposite her.

"It's not for myself that I'm looking for a house," she resumed, "but for my step-daughter, Mrs. Loftus, who has been ordered by her physician to exchange the air of London for seven or eight months of the year for that of the country. I had a glimpse of Vale View—there's not much of it can be seen from the road—when I was out driving the other day, and it seemed to me just the kind of place Amelia is in want of. By the way, I have not yet inquired as to the rent—a point," she smilingly added, "which is usually regarded as one of paramount importance."

"The rent is one hundred guineas a year," answered Miss Matilda.

"Hum. I fancy that is rather more than Amelia thought of giving. Still, I don't suppose a few guineas more or less would be allowed to stand in her way if the place suited her in other respects. I should like to go thoroughly over it, so as to be in a position to send her a full report. I presume there is no objection to my doing so."

"None whatever, Lady Pell. The keys shall be placed at your disposal whenever you please."

"There's no time like the time present. I've nothing to do this afternoon and I'll go at once. By-the-bye, is there anyone that knows the place who can go with me?"

The sisters looked at each other in perplexity.

On the spur of the moment they could not think of anyone. Why, oh why, had she not gone to the house agent and done her business through him!

Lady Pell was looking from one to the other with an amused smile. She had heard a good deal from one of her friends about the twins and their little peculiarities. "Who is that very pretty girl I saw busy in the garden just now?" she asked.

"That is our niece," responded Miss Jane, speaking for the first time.

"Then perhaps she will condescend to act as my cicerone."

The faces of the sisters lighted up.

"You could not have a more efficient one," responded Miss Matilda.

"I have a weakness for young and pretty faces," resumed Lady Pell, "due perhaps to the fact that it is so long since I was young myself and that at no time was I ever otherwise than plain-looking."

Ethel was at once summoned, introduced to Lady Pell, and told what was required of her. In a very short time the two were being driven in the brougham in the direction of Vale View, calling on their way at the house agent's to obtain possession of the keys.

When they got back to Rose Mount, afternoon tea had just been brought in, whereupon Miss Matilda begged of her ladyship to join them, which she frankly did. But long before this she and Ethel had become on excellent terms with each other, for, unlike the sisters, who had been rather overawed by their visitor's authoritative manner and high-pitched voice, the girl had hardly been ten minutes in Lady Pell's company before, as by a sort of instinct, she seemed to divine the existence of the really fine qualities out of which her character was built up. Lady Pell recognised this and was proportionally gratified, and from that moment she laid herself out to draw Ethel to her by a bond which should prove a source of interest and pleasure to both.

By the time tea was over the sisters had discovered that their first and not altogether flattering estimate of Lady Pell was a quite erroneous one. They too felt drawn towards her although in a lesser degree, just as Ethel had been. Behind a magisterial and somewhat repellent exterior, which to many people caused her to seem a somewhat formidable personage, lay a transparent sincerity of purpose and a hatred of pretence or cant of any kind, which had an attraction for, and gradually endeared her to, those of a like disposition to her own. Then too, she was a well-informed person, with singularly clear and observant faculties, who, when she chose, could be very good

company, and on the present occasion she did so choose. She had not failed to notice that the sisters had been repelled, and perhaps somewhat cowed, by her slightly aggressive manner at their opening interview, and she now set herself to reverse the mental verdict which they had evidently passed upon her.

Most people of Lady Pell's position and standing in society would have seen in the sisters only a couple of impoverished old maids whose good opinion could be of no possible consequence to anybody. But her ladyship had a way of looking at people and things from other than a mere surface and conventional point of view. From the first the sisters attracted her, and she made up her mind then and there that she would see more of them. Speaking of them next day to her hostess at Foljambe Court she said: "They are a couple of gems—that is the only word I can think of which conveys my impression of them—and I shall feel proud to be reckoned among the number of their friends."

Lady Pell's first words to Miss Matilda after the return of herself and Ethel from their inspection of Vale View, were: "Well, Miss Thursby, your niece and I have done what I call a very fair afternoon's work, and if she is not tired, I must confess that I am. We have been into every nook and corner of the house—upstairs, downstairs, and in my lady's chamber—and a pretty tramp we found it—that is to say, I did, for I am by no means so active as I once was. Then we extended our survey to the offices and outhouses, the coach-house and stable and, lastly, to the grounds. Now, as I am one of those people who dislike to lock up their opinions, especially when, as in the present instance, the opinion happens to be a favourable one, I will at once admit that I am greatly pleased with the house and its surroundings. It seems to me the very place to suit my step-daughter. I will write her by to-night's post, asking her to run down and look over it for herself, so that you may shortly expect to see me here again."

This was good news for the sisters. The letting of Vale View meant a very desirable addition to their limited means.

Following upon this, as already recounted, came afternoon tea, over which her ladyship kept them all alive by her vivacious and somewhat quizzical account of her presentation at court, and of sundry other experiences during the term of her late husband's year of office as Lord Mayor.

Her last words to Ethel before going were: "Take notice, my dear, that I shall call for you at three o'clock to-morrow to take you for a drive. You are looking a little bit peaky, and a long country drive will do you good."

"What excellent company her ladyship is!" said Miss Matilda to her sister as they stood and watched the brougham drive away.

"I cannot remember when I laughed so much in so short a time as I have this afternoon."

"And she is so good-natured with it all. Besides, it is quite

evident that she is as quick to see and quiz her own little peculiarities as she is those of others."

"I wonder whether she will quiz you and me to her friends, when she gets back to Foljambe Court."

"I think it very likely," responded Miss Matilda drily. "But that she will not do it ill-naturedly we may be sure."

It was the same evening. The sisters had retired each to her own chamber, and Miss Jane was in the act of arranging her hair for the night, when Miss Matilda, in dressing-gown and slippers, appeared suddenly before her.

"Sister," she said, "what a pair of numskulls you and I must be to imagine that our only way of raising the sum of fifty pounds was by obtaining it on the loan of our jewellery and plate!"

"And what other way is there?" demanded Miss Jane with a stare.

"A way that would have occurred to anyone but two ignorant women who know nothing about business affairs. We can, I feel sure, and that without the least difficulty, obtain an advance, not merely of fifty pounds, but of several times that amount, if required, on the security of the title-deeds of Vale View (our joint freehold property), which are at present in the custody of Mr. Linaway."

"Oh, Mattie, how clever of you to have thought of such a thing! And what a relief it will be not to have mamma's jewels go out of our own keeping even for a single day!"

Miss Matilda nodded assent. "I don't mind confessing now," she said, "that last night I scarcely slept a wink for thinking of my coming interview with Mr. Daykin. That I shall sleep soundly to-night I do not doubt."

Lady Pell was as good as her word. She called next afternoon in an open carriage and carried off Ethel for a ten-miles drive. A couple of days later she was at Rose Mount again, this time accompanied by her step-daughter, Mrs. Loftus. They had called for the keys of Vale View. On their return the sisters had the gratification of being told that Mrs. Loftus had agreed to take the house, and would enter upon its tenancy almost immediately.

If, after the conclusion of the business between them, the sisters imagined that, in all likelihood, they should see no more of Lady Pell, they were mistaken. As long as she should remain at Foljambe Court she evidently intended not to lose sight of them. Seldom did she let more than a couple of days go by without calling at Rose Mount, and at least twice a week she insisted on taking Ethel for an afternoon drive. They all grew to like her more than at one time they would have thought it possible that they should like anyone after so brief an acquaintance.

Meanwhile no further steps were taken in the matter of the loan. Thanks to Lady Pell, Ethel was already looking brighter and better, and when the former confided to the sisters that her visit would not

terminate till the middle of September, Miss Matilda said to Miss Jane when they were alone: "We shall lose nothing by delaying our holiday till after Lady Pell's departure. A decided improvement is already discernible in the dear girl's health; besides which, all the sea-side resorts will be much less crowded, and, consequently, far pleasanter during the latter half of September than they are now."

But all these dispositions came to naught one afternoon when Lady Pell's visit had still about a week to run. She was sitting with the sisters, Ethel being out of the room, when she startled them as they had rarely been startled by saying apropos to nothing that had gone before: "My dear friends, if I may be permitted to call you so, I want you to do me a very great favour, which is neither more nor less than to allow me to run off with your niece for a couple of months at the very least."

The sisters gazed at each other in consternation. Neither of them spoke: they could not.

"The fact is," resumed Lady Pell, "that my companion, Miss Beilby, whom you have heard me speak of as being away just now on account of her health, instead of recovering, as I had hoped she presently would do, has unfortunately taken a turn for the worse, and goodness only knows when she will be well enough to come back to me. While at Foljambe Court I don't much miss her, but as soon as I leave there I shall want someone to replace her for the time being. Now, that I have taken a great fancy to your niece you must by this time be well aware, and I think that if she were to come to me for a couple of months, or longer if you can spare her, the change could scarcely fail to prove beneficial to her, while, at the same time, you would be conferring on me a great personal favour. On leaving here I purpose going direct to a sunny château in France, the home of a very dear friend of mine, there to stay for some time. Is it asking too much that you should allow your niece to be my *compagnon de voyage?*"

As far as the reader is concerned, it will be enough to state that when, about a week later, Lady Pell left Foljambe Court and St. Oswyth's, she took Ethel with her.

Now, it may be here remarked, Lady Pell was first cousin to Sir Gilbert Clare.

(*To be continued.*)

NATURE'S GOOD SAMARITANS.

SOME people, as was beautifully said of the Princess Alice, are born to serve, or in Timon's words, to do benefits. They are to be met with in cottage and palace, amongst savages, slaves, and despots; and happy the home or neighbourhood that possesses one of them. Natural good Samaritans, they never stop to ask, "Who is my neighbour?" but are at the beck and call of anyone in trouble, the warm well-springs of their sympathy ever ready to gush forth at the lightest touch. And they will nurse or help the merest stranger as if it were their brother or sister.

The writer numbers one such among her poorer friends, a merry, sweet-faced, simple-hearted little woman; and though still young, her deeds of kindness, many of them doubtless forgotten by herself as well as by the recipients, would fill a large volume. When remonstrated with on the ravages thus often made on her own health and strength, she says, without a trace of self-complacency or scarcely even of self-consciousness—

"I can't help it; when I see anyone in trouble I feel as if I must be doing something for them."

Stanley tells of an officer in Africa who, overcome by fever, had sunk in the grass by the wayside, and was found by a native warrior, armed with spear, bow and arrows. This man, as the great explorer remarks, had never heard the story of the good Samaritan. But acting in accordance with its teaching, he went away and returned with a half gallon gourd of fresh cool milk for the sufferer, who, receiving new strength from it, rose up and marched to camp.

It is a joy, as Wordsworth says, to think the best we can of human kind; and even if few of us can claim for ourselves that to us

> "all earthly joys go less
> To the one joy of doing kindnesses,"

yet none will deny the pleasure there is in hearing of a kindly action, or in seeing one performed, by whomsoever it may be. For the veriest cynic is pleased in his inmost heart to find a vein of goodness in this poor old world of ours, which it is so much the fashion to abuse.

What is it that constitutes the charm of the world's favourites in history and literature? Of pimply-faced, long-visaged Sir Philip Sydney, the darling of chivalry? Of ugly, pock-marked Oliver Goldsmith, the most beloved of writers, as Swinburne truly calls him; of Charles Lamb, "the best beloved"—Charles Lamb, the stammering buffoon of Carlyle's contempt, the idol of all who can appreciate him. Is it not that they were kind, large-hearted, charitable men, that in all they did or wrote or said, can be traced the genuine good-Samaritanism

of their natures? So that the milk of human kindness in them presents a perpetual draught of refreshment to our thoughts, delightful as was the glass of cold water passed from his own parched lips to those of the dying soldier by Sir Philip Sydney, in his last earthly act of kindness.

In fiction, even, it is the same. What makes Don Quixote, for all his folly, the chosen hero of our hearts? What but his readiness, crazy though the manifestations of it may have been, to help the distressed. What wins us to my uncle Toby but his tender humanity? To Pickwick, but the same magic virtue which shines out through all his failings and vulgarities.

And what is it but the lack of this crowning charm which comes between many a brilliant and else good man, or book, and what may seem his, or its, rightful meed of popularity.

"Kindness is in our power, even though fondness may not be," remarked Doctor Johnson, himself one of Nature's good Samaritans; and through virtue of that charm in him, retaining his undying hold on our affections, in spite of all his uncouthness, brusqueness, and occasional even brutality of manner. And, with one of those touches of worldly wisdom which set so quaintly on his large, compassionate, melancholy nature, he once observed to Boswell that the cultivation of kindness forms a valuable part even of the business of life.

An old German story tells how a father on his death-bed, after dividing his property amongst his three sons, promised a costly ring yet remaining to the one of them who should have performed the most praiseworthy action.

The first related how once, while his fortunes were at their lowest ebb, he had seen a rich man drop his well-filled purse, and resisting the inclination to appropriate the prize, had immediately restored it to its owner. This, however, was put aside as a mere act of common honesty.

The next then boasted how once, by the banks of a river, he had seen a child fall in and at the risk of his life had rescued the little one from the hurrying tide and restored it to its distracted mother. But this deed likewise was discounted as one of mere ordinary humanity which none but the cruel and selfish would have left undone.

Then came the turn of the youngest. With the frank modesty characteristic of the good boy of the old-fashioned story-books, he told how in a far country where his garden had been the pride and joy of his heart he had been annoyed by the nightly depredations of a thief who bore away his fruits as soon as they became ripe. One night this thankless customer fell from off his ladder and broke his leg. Did the good youth deliver him up to justice? No. With forbearing mercy he nursed him back to health and strength, as also to an honest way of life.

Needless to say, the youngest son was rewarded with the ring.

If one of the natural good Samaritans we are speaking of were asked to give an account of his humanest deeds the task would be an impossible one, for they belong mostly to those little unregarded, unremembered deeds of love and kindness which continually keep springing up like flowers on life's way-side, gladden a heart here and there by their sweetness, and fade away forgotten. The man whose act of simple benevolence gave the name of Good Samaritan to anyone who, like him, shows disinterested kindnesses to strangers (supposing the story to be a record of actual fact) little thought he was immortalising himself and his deed.

We are not all of nature's good Samaritans, yet the "Go and do likewise" is addressed to all alike.

We all know the story of the philanthropist who was having his head phrenologically examined, when the disciple of Spurzheim remarked to him: "For the first time I begin to doubt of the truth of my science. If I did not know who you were I should have judged you to be one of the last men to spend your life on others. The bumps of benevolence and self-denial are almost wholly wanting."

"And for the first time," returned the other, "I begin to believe in it, for naturally I am devoid of those qualities, and had to force myself to practise them against all my inclinations."

With God on our side, as has been said, we may establish virtues exactly opposite to our failings. Or, as Lowell puts it, "While tenderness of feeling and susceptibility to generous emotions are accidents of temperament, goodness is an achievement of the will and a quality of the life."

It is, we believe, old Jeremy Taylor who says God never crowns those virtues which are only faculties and dispositions. And though these natural good Samaritans must be peculiarly dear to Him from their kinship to His own nature, yet will the divine prototype of the good Samaritan smile on every effort of resolution, every pang of performance that attends the cultivation of kindliness on the part of those to whom it does not naturally come.

Cardinal Newman has an exquisite passage enjoining the apprenticeship to goodness and its practice, as one would practice at any art or trade. The workman gradually becomes accustomed to his tools and tasks till he attains proficiency in his work, however hard he may at first have found it. And the exercise of kindness grows gradually easier till habit at last makes it second nature.

PAULINE W. ROOSE.

AN OLD WOMAN'S ROMANCE.

By E. M. Alford.

I.

IT was a lovely day in June, cloudy, with possibilities of storms in the fine clouds that threw such lovely shadows over the tors here and there, but with brilliant sunshine too; just the day for the moor with its ever-varying changes of light and shade. So, having finished my solitary breakfast, I told my landlady to put me up a basket with some luncheon, as I intended to have a day on the moor. Then wrapping a warm, soft grey shawl around me over my grey dress, and putting on my black silk, drawn, poke bonnet, I sallied forth, basket on arm, with an old umbrella as a walking-stick.

A quaint figure I must have looked, for I am an old woman now, and poke bonnets, though an excellent shield from the sun, make a white old face look all the whiter. I was staying at a farmhouse on Dartmoor, three miles from the nearest town, and on the outskirts of the little moorland village. People think it a queer place to sojourn in, but I know the place and the people, and I love it all, and with my books for companions I never feel lonely. It is also partly on Nancy's account that I am here; Nancy, my great-niece, and the prettiest and brightest girl in Devonshire. The moorland air is a fine tonic for her, and blows away the cobwebs of the High School in which she has chosen to become a teacher.

However, it was nothing to me how I looked. I might be a veritable old guy, but who was there to see me but the pretty Dartmoor sheep and ponies, with perhaps stray villagers now and again, who were too much accustomed to me to notice my dress.

I had wandered rather further than usual, having an ambition to reach our nearest tor, and to eat my lunch under its shadow. And a cosy nook I had found in which to ensconce myself, with a delicious cushion of springy heather to sit upon, and a bit of the grey granite tor to rest my weary back against, and such a panorama of moorland and sky upon which to feast my eyes. Here, then, I sat, and ate my pasty and drank my bottle of milk with good relish, and what with the long walk, the heat, and my good repast, I became very drowsy, and leaning my head sideways against a conveniently jutting ledge of granite, fell fast asleep.

How long I slept I cannot tell, but when I awoke at last with a start I was sorely puzzled for a bit to know where I was, one does get off so sound in those after-dinner naps! Besides, I had been dreaming, as I so often do with surprising clearness, of the long ago days, and

my mind felt rather bewildered. Suddenly I heard a compassionate voice exclaim—

"You poor old woman! what on earth are you doing out here alone on this desolate moor?"

This speech brought me to my senses speedily, more especially as the voice was a man's voice unmistakably, and also that of a gentleman. So I pulled myself together, and gazing up at the stranger from out of the depths of my poke bonnet remarked calmly—

"I am here for the sake of the air, chiefly; we consider it remarkably fine."

"I beg your pardon," said the gentleman starting at the sound of my voice; "I fear I must have appeared intrusive."

"Not at all," I answered; "it was very kind of you to take pity on a poor lorn old woman. I can quite imagine how my appearance here would strike a stranger."

"I—I thought," said the gentleman, evidently at a loss how to proceed, and yet with an amused smile playing around his eyes, his mouth being hid by a grey moustache, for he wore a complete beard.

"You thought," said I, taking pity upon him, "that I was some poverty-stricken old woman, who was driven to take shelter under this tor for lack of other home? Or more likely that I was a bit daft, and wandered about like Wordsworth's Ruth, only amid the Dartmoor wilds instead of the Quantock Hills?"

"Well, to confess the truth, some such ideas had passed through my mind, and I was halting here irresolute, not liking to leave a sister who might want my help, alone, unaided, and yet unwilling to disturb your nap."

"That was very kind of you," I replied; "and since we have made acquaintance with one another, will you not allow me to offer you such hospitality as lies in my power, by returning with me to my temporary home for refreshment. The farm-house where I am lodging is barely a mile from hence, whereas the town to which I presume you are bound, must be nearly four miles off, and the trains which stop at our village station are but few."

"Thank you heartily," he returned, in that pleasant mellow voice which somehow seemed familiar to me, causing a strange thrill of emotion to pass over me as I gazed up into the fine face of my companion. Curiously enough, I noticed a quick glance of surprise and half recognition in his eyes as my own encountered them. What bond of association could there be between this fine, soldierly, hale-looking man, and my own frail, elderly self?

However, I put aside all puzzling thoughts, and gave myself up to the pleasure of the present time. And a real pleasure it was to me to have half-an-hour's intercourse with a refined, cultured, travelled gentleman. Quite a little oasis in the somewhat monotonous routine of my lonely life. We talked of many things. He was full of

intelligent interest in the legends and histories of our moors, on which I dilated *con amore*. From that, we went further afield, and I revived memories of travels in Italy some thirty years ago, with a vivid freshness which almost surprised myself. He drew me on—I could see that afterwards. Most of the talking was on my side, he throwing in a remark now and again which opened some fresh flood-gate of memory of mine, and showed how fresh and keen was his own interest in the places, people and books we discussed. He had lately been sojourning in the sunny south on his way home from India, and was now, he told me, house-hunting in the old country, as he had retired from actice service, and wanted to make a home for himself and his son in some choice part of our favoured England.

He had thrown himself on the heather beside me, and we were talking quite like old friends.

Insensibly—I knew not why—my mind wandered back rather sadly to a foolish hero-worship of my young life, when such an one in the prime of youthful manhood had crossed my path for a time, and taken kindly notice of the shy, enthusiastic girl, who had been brought up in the peaceful seclusion of a Devonshire rectory, with the best of fathers to superintend her education and tastes, and who had naturally, Miranda-like, fallen captive to the charms of the first courteous youth who had deigned to notice her. Ah well! that was more than forty years ago, and had long remained but as a pleasant if somewhat pathetic picture upon my memory; what need to recall it with regret now? My life had been full of mercies, a happy and I hope not altogether a useless one. I suppose a smile must have flitted across my face; for suddenly my companion started to his feet with an eager exclamation of pleasure, which effectually put a stop to my dreaming, as he said:

"Thank God, it is true! I half guessed it before, but there is no mistaking that smile of eye and lip. It is the same Molly Morden of forty years ago, whose sweet soul shines out through those tell-tale eyes."

Well, really! was not that enough to upset a sensitive old lady's nerves? I felt all of a tremble, and I fancy tears came into my eyes and trickled quietly down my cheeks, behind the shelter of my poke bonnet. What a comfort that bonnet was to me then! It was a complete screen from the eager questioning glances of my companion, as I turned my head aside to gain time to think, and to rally my spirits. But he went on eagerly all the same, without a word of encouragement from me, and I listened spell-bound, till it began to dawn upon me at last that all this was really true. And that the romance of those far-away days had been a real romance after all, and not the foolish delusion of a home-bred girl. And my heart rose up in thankfulness and glad content.

The story he told was a simple one. I had been his first love, but he was in no position to marry when he visited at our pretty Rectory

as a young subaltern from Plymouth in those early days. But before leaving for India he had come down once more to try and find out whether the love was all on his side, or whether perchance, I too cared a little. And I avoided him, and treated him with strange coldness, and on his last call, which he had told me before would be a good-bye one, I purposely made some other engagement, and bade my sister bid him good-bye for me just as though he were a mere casual acquaintance, and he went away hurt and disappointed. Soon after his arrival in India he was thrown a great deal with the pretty daughter of his commanding officer, who gave him frank encouragement, having lost her heart to him at first sight, it seemed, and in due course they were married, and had a happy but short wedded life, for she had died early, leaving him with one son, to whom he was devoted.

"My boy is almost a middle-aged man now," he said, "but he is as foolish about his old father as he was as a lad, and I thank God more fervently every year for having given me such a son as Robin. He is high up in the Indian Civil Service, but his health has suffered from a prolonged strain of work, and he is invalided home for a year. Don't you think we might take up our abode on your moors, for the sake of your 'remarkably fine air?'"

There was just that same half bantering smile in his eyes as he quoted my own words, which I remembered so well in those former days, when he would quiz me good-humouredly for my quaint old-world ways. And the happy past rose up before me with almost overwhelming distinctness, and I felt that I had best get back as quickly as I could to my quiet lodgings, and finish our interview there. So I rose up, and said as quietly as my agitation permitted:

"I think if you do not object I will be moving homewards now, and we can discuss your plans over a cup of tea in my parlour. It is a *very* great pleasure to meet you again, and to find that you remember so kindly those dear old days, but you will understand that it is rather agitating to the spirits of a frail old woman like me, who has been living so much in the past, and who has seen so many dear ones who belonged to it pass away. It makes me very happy—not sad, you understand—to see you and hear you talk, but I think I had best be going home."

He seemed to understand in a minute how I felt, and picking up my basket, and placing my hand within his arm, began to descend from the tor in silence. I was inclined to withdraw my hand, for I can manage the hills pretty fairly as a rule, but somehow that tottery feeling I sometimes get had come over me, and a foolish mistiness would come into my eyes now and again; so that really it was a help to have a strong arm to rest on.

And so we got home, with only an exchange of a few words now and again till we reached the farmhouse, where I took him, nothing loth, into my pretty little parlour, and bid him rest and enjoy the

view in my arm-chair, while I went to order tea, and to discard my bonnet and shawl.

Our quiet talk over the old days and about my saintly father, which we had after tea, sitting one on each side of the open window looking out on the grand and peaceful view, seems too sacred to be described even to Nancy. I told him a little about her, and of her brave struggle to keep herself since her father had married again, and how that my home was a home for her whenever she felt inclined, and that it was in a great measure on her account that I had settled down upon the moor.

"You must see my Nancy some time," I said as he rose at last to go. "I think she and I must be somewhat such friends as you and your son are, though Nancy is a generation below again. But she has been so much with me off and on, during her mother's long illness, which obliged her to be much abroad, and especially of late since her father's second marriage, that she seems well-nigh to belong to me. A bonnie girl she is, just like a sunbeam when she comes out on our moors, and throws off all her cares."

"I am sure she must be delightful," he replied as he took my hand in his friendly grasp, "since the mere mention of her name makes her Aunt Molly's eyes shine as they did when she was eighteen!"

With which really foolish remark he departed.

II.

I saw nothing more of my old friend for more than a week after our wonderful meeting on the moor, but I received a hurried note from him the next day but one, saying that the morning's post had brought him tidings of his son's arrival in Portsmouth, and that he was going at once to join him, but should hope ere long to bring him to see me, and to enjoy our exhilarating moorland air, having quite decided to take up his residence in the neighbourhood.

It may seem ridiculous, but it would be wrong to deny, that I felt in a strange flutter of happiness at these tidings.

Rather more than a week had passed, when Nancy tapped at my window one bright afternoon, and the next minute my little room seemed filled with sunshine. The dear child rushed in and threw her arms around me, as I arose out of my chair to greet her.

"I have got a week's holiday, Aunt Molly," she said. "We have been short-handed lately, and I was getting a bit overworked, so now Miss Cameron has sent me off to you to be made a 'perfect cure.' Miss Maitland has come back, and she says they can manage for a week without me, when I must return with fresh vigour for the examinations. Oh, how lovely! a whole week with my Aunt Molly in this delicious place!"

Of course I was delighted; the weather was perfect, and we were

out of doors nearly all day long. Nancy's colour soon came back again, but she seemed to like the quiet more than usual, which suited me, but showed that she needed the rest.

It was on the second day after she came that Nancy proposed we should stroll out to the tor in the afternoon, and I should show her the exact spot where General Carthew had come upon the "poor, lorn old woman" who had excited his compassion. She had brought me out as a present a lovely white shawl of her own making, so soft and dainty, I hardly knew myself in it; this she insisted on wrapping around me. She had also done something to my bonnet, which made it much more becoming, she declared, and having thus decked out her old aunt, and thrown her own pretty but cheap straw hat carelessly on the top of her bright auburn hair, she took my frail arm within her strong, young one, and we sallied forth.

Nancy was tall and slim, and so active and light of foot, that the distance was nothing to her; but although she went very slowly, suiting her steps to mine, yet I felt quite tired as we began ascending the tor. Suddenly Nancy halted and I felt a little tremor in the arm which supported me.

"Oh, auntie, there they are! shall we go back?" she exclaimed.

"Who are there? and why should we turn back, child?" I said wearily. "I must sit down and rest somewhere, and surely the tor is large enough to give us room to rest, if others are here before us."

Nancy said nothing in reply and we went on, slowly ascending the tor, I looking down to see to my walking over the uneven surface, till we were close to the spot of my adventure.

"Here we are at last!" I exclaimed, "and I shall be glad enough of a rest after the climb."

So saying I raised my eyes and was startled to see immediately in front of us, seated in our intended resting-place, General Carthew and his son.

There was no mistaking the latter, he was so like the Frank Carthew I had known; older, of course, than he had been, but just as I should have pictured him in my maturer fancy. No wonder Nancy had hesitated to go on; her quick insight had told her who these strangers were, and we had as it were thrust ourselves upon them.

But the genuine delight with which the General welcomed us, and introduced his son to us both, after greeting Nancy in his pleasant way with, "You must be Miss Nancy, I am sure, for there is a look of 'Aunt Molly' in your eyes," soon set us at our ease.

The two gentlemen arranged their rugs comfortably for us in my former nook, and then threw themselves on the heather at our feet, and so we made our first acquaintance with Robin Carthew.

Both gentlemen were most polite to me. They were concerned, I suppose, at my white face, for I was weary with my climb, and insisted on producing a tempting repast from their knapsacks, and spreading

it on a granite rock that cropped up conveniently beside us. I sent Nancy off to get some water from a spring well-known to us both, and Mr. Carthew asked to be allowed to go with her to bring back the flagon filled. And as I watched them walk off together with such swift ease over the broken ground, I immediately began castle-building, silly old woman as I was!

"What do you think of my boy?" asked General Carthew, looking down upon me with such an amused smile, that I half feared he had divined my foolish thought.

"I think he is a second edition of his father," I said; "after that remark you cannot expect me to go into particulars."

"No, indeed," answered the General with a cheery laugh, "but I assure you he is a much improved and altogether superior edition; the new ones always are, you know."

"And yet we prize our old books best," I said, before I had quite realised the import of what I was saying, and really thinking in part of some old favourites on my shelf at home.

"That is very kindly spoken," said my companion in a strangely moved voice, which made me glance up at him in surprise. And then he went on hurriedly, "I have been living over those old days so much since last we met, and I have been wondering whether you would think me *very* foolish and presumptuous, if I were to ask you to marry me even so late in the day, and to bless the remainder of my life with your sweet presence."

"I could not think anything you did foolish," I answered, feeling my cheeks flush with surprise and emotion. "And as for presumption, in asking a frail, feeble old lady like me to accept the honour you offer me, I think it is all the other way. But believe me, General Carthew, we are better as we are. Let us be fast friends, and neighbours too if you will. I should esteem your friendship as a priceless boon, but I could not burden you with a frail and feeble wife. Moreover, to tell the truth," I added, trying to turn off the subject with a laugh, for I felt more than half inclined to break down—"I have been accustomed to my own way for so many years, that I think it might be rather perilous to promise to obey even you."

"I will risk the obedience if you will only consent to be my wife; and as for feebleness and frailty, what could I wish for better than to watch over you and care for you, as long as we both may live," he said very earnestly.

It was very good of him to put it like that, and I could not trust myself to speak, so only shook my head; and just then our young people came in sight, and I was glad of the diversion.

They came swiftly towards us, Nancy rather taking the lead with her light, graceful walk. Very pretty she looked, with her cheeks rosy with the air and exercise, and her eyes shining, and her hair straying in little curls upon her forehead. She had a pretty playful way with her too, which was very taking. The shyness of her first meeting

with our friends had vanished during this short expedition with Mr. Carthew, and she came up to me with a merry complaint.

"Aunt Molly, Mr. Carthew declares my education is defective, because I do not happen to know the outlandish Indian station where he has been acting as judge. Will you tell him, please, all about my certificates, and that I am really and truly a teacher in a High School. He seems to find it difficult to credit it."

"It was not any doubt of Miss Nancy's capability that staggered me," said Robin, "but the terrible fact that she, with her love of the free moorland, should be spending the best part of her days in a dismal High School."

"Have your holidays begun already?" asked General Carthew.

"Oh, no, we have not finished the term yet, but I have been rather over-worked and so am given a week's leave of absence," replied Nancy; "and of course I flew off to Aunt Molly at once. This is only the second day since I came, and I feel quite well already."

"Miss Nancy and I are both on leave for the same cause," said Mr. Carthew, as they seated themselves around our granite table, which Nancy was decorating with sprigs of heather, "and we mean to enjoy ourselves, don't we?" he asked, looking at her with a glance which recalled so vividly his father's way of appealing to me forty years ago, that I felt rather bewildered.

"I have not seen Robin so cheery since his return," he said to me when the meal was over, and the other two were engaged in readjusting the contents of the knapsacks. "I think Miss Nancy is a better tonic for him than any the doctors have prescribed. Do you think we could find lodgings in your village for awhile, before settling down into a more permanent home?"

So I told him that my landlady Mrs. Collins had a son who lived in a better farm-house than ours, and who sometimes took in lodgers, and promised to make inquiries of her if he and his son would come back to my lodgings for tea.

My invitation was received with alacrity, and I resolved to go home in good time to give her warning, and to leave Nancy to bring on our guests.

Mrs. Collins quite rose to the occasion, and when about half-past five o'clock Nancy brought her charges home, I think they were quite ready to enjoy my good things and the rest and refreshment of my pretty, cool room. General Carthew was a little tired, and consented to be placed in an easy chair with a table beside him, and to be waited upon by Nancy. The junket and the strawberries and cream came in for a special share of commendation. And Mr. Carthew told his father laughingly that he would find it costly work keeping him, if he intended going in for Miss Morland's style of house-keeping.

That day's pleasant intercourse was but a precursor of still pleasanter ones to come, as we all grew to be more at home with one another. The Carthews took up their abode at Jack Collins's

farm next day; and morning, afternoon and evening, we met either at their lodgings or at mine, or out on our beautiful moors. The weather was perfect, bright sunshine but with a clearness and exhilarating freshness in the air that kept the heat from being oppressive. We sat out of doors a great deal, Nancy and I with work or sketch-book; the General, who was a really good artist, with his canvas and brushes, and Mr. Carthew with a book, from which he would read to us with a charm of expression and intonation which reminded me of what had first fascinated me in his father more than forty years before.

It was touching to notice the deference which Mr. Carthew showed to his father's slightest remark. Sometimes we older ones may be inclined to feel that the young ones are rather impatient of us and our tasks and views, and consider us "out of date." But with Robin Carthew there was not the slightest sign of anything of the sort. Evidently he looked up to his father—middle-aged man though he was himself—with a reverence as deep as his love.

III.

THE last evening of Nancy's stay came all too soon, we thought. Both the gentlemen had had tea with us, and there had been a prolonged ramble afterwards, till I grew weary, and the General insisted on conducting me home and leaving the younger ones to return at their leisure.

It was late before Nancy arrived, and she was alone, which surprised me. I had been sitting for some time in the twilight letting my foolish thoughts wander off into romantic surmises about my child, and felt disappointed.

"Would not Mr. Carthew have come in to supper?" I asked. "The General would not wait for him in case we cared to keep him."

"Did he say that?" asked Nancy looking rather troubled. "I am afraid it was inhospitable, auntie, but I did not ask him in."

"Well, that was hardly Devonshire manners, certainly," said I, feeling rather aggrieved. "But you look tired, child, come and have some supper yourself, at all events."

"I couldn't eat any, thank you, dear auntie," she replied stooping down and kissing me. "I think I will go upstairs and pack if you don't mind, and get early to bed."

I wondered what had happened to take away my Nancy's usually healthy appetite, but I did not ask her any questions; if she had anything she wished to tell me, I had rather she should do it of her own free-will.

Next morning, before I was up, she came into my room dressed for departure, and leaning her fair young face over me to kiss me, said:

"Mrs. Collins is going to drive into the market early, auntie, and I

have asked her to let me go with her. I can take the early train to Plymouth from the town, instead of waiting for a later one from here."

"But why are you in such a hurry, child?" I exclaimed; "you have not had an earlier summons, have you?"

"Oh, no, but I have a reason for leaving early, and I think my plan is the best. You must please say good-bye to General Carthew for me," she said, and as though to escape further questioning she was gone.

I felt a bit shaken, so had my breakfast upstairs, and before I was quite dressed the little maid came up and told me that Mr Carthew was downstairs asking for Miss Nancy; and when he heard she was gone, said he wanted to see me particularly.

So I hastened my toilet and went down. He was standing with his back to me looking out of the window when I entered, and I was quite scared by the alteration in his face when he turned towards me, it was so worn and sad-looking.

"Has she left any message for me?" he asked.

"No," I answered sadly, "did you expect any? She only bid me say good-bye to General Carthew for her."

"I was idiot enough to hope that I should see her or hear from her again," he said rather bitterly. Then rallying himself with an effort, he put out his hand in farewell, saying:

"Excuse my churlishness, Miss Morden, I have no one to blame but myself and my own ridiculous folly," and before I could reply, he was gone.

That was a very sad morning for me. I felt hurt and disappointed, as well as puzzled. For the first time a cloud seemed to have come between Nancy and me. She had hardly treated me quite kindly, I was tempted to feel, in leaving me thus abruptly and without any explanation, and really, my thoughts had been so full of her lately. And now she had gone without one word of loving confidence to her old aunt, and I actually sat down to my desk with a view of giving Nancy a bit of my mind.

But as I sat balancing my pen and considering how to begin, there arose before me a picture of a young girl more than forty years ago walking swiftly across dew-laden meadows from her rectory home to spend a long day—a self-invited guest—with a girl friend at a neighbouring vicarage. And suddenly my pen fell from my fingers, and I hid my face in my hands, ashamed of my unjust anger; whilst tears trickled through my fingers, partly in compassion for the young spirit passing through the same old trouble, and partly as a tribute to my own heart-ache of long ago.

I don't know how long I sat there, but I was aroused at last by a hand being laid on my shoulder, and a voice which seemed to come out of those vanished years, saying to me:

"We must not let them make the same mistake. Let us consult how best to help them."

Of course it was General Carthew, even more cast down than I was, fearing the shipwreck of his precious son's happiness, but unlike me, planning at once how to try to avert the trouble which threatened them. I felt rebuked for the second time that morning; truly I needed much teaching.

"Robin is terribly cut up," he said very sadly. "I never saw my boy in such trouble before, and although he tries to bear it bravely, I fear its effect on his scarcely recovered health. Have you any clue to Miss Nancy's conduct?"

"None whatever from her," I answered, "but I cannot but guess that her heart is concerned in it, or she would not have left me so abruptly."

"Did she tell you anything of what passed between them last evening?" he asked.

"No, she did not even mention your son's name, her only message was one of good-bye to yourself. Indeed, she allowed me no time for talk, either last night or this morning;" and then I told him what I have set down here of her early retiring to her room, and her morning flitting.

"Poor Robin!" sighed the General, the puzzled frown deepening on his forehead. "Maybe, after all, he is right. And yet I cannot understand a good girl like Nancy being blind to the true nobleness of his character, or indifferent to his love."

"He does love her then; does she know it?" I asked eagerly.

"Alas, poor fellow! he loves her with the devotion of a reserved but enthusiastic disposition. Even now, he is more concerned for her than for himself, fearing that the unintended avowal of his love as they parted last evening has driven her thus hastily away, and is resolved to go off somewhere for a time to cure himself, as he says, of his folly, and to leave Nancy free to return to her moors without the dread of encountering him."

"Oh! surely there is no need of that," I exclaimed. "Nancy will have to be in Plymouth for nearly a month, and I cannot help thinking that there is some mistake which will soon be set right when they meet again. Did he tell you what Nancy said in reply to his avowal?"

"Something rather incoherent as far as I can understand, to the effect that it could 'never be.' And when he urged to be allowed to come and speak to you this morning, she only shook her head and fled. I tried to cheer him by recalling my early experiences, and suggesting that Miss Nancy might have a share of her Aunt Molly's sensitive pride, and would see things differently after a quiet talk with you. So he was not quite so down-hearted when he set off this morning, after a scarcely tasted breakfast, to learn his fate, and you know, poor fellow, what he found."

"Poor children!" I said sadly, my heart aching for their present trouble, although I felt no doubt as to its all coming right in the end.

And so ended for a time this episode in my quiet life. General Carthew and his son left the neighbourhood for an indefinite time. Nancy was very busy at school with the examinations, and wrote but short notes from time to time, which seemed to lack their usual brightness.

The weeks slipped by, and the time for Nancy's holidays approached. I wrote to her a few days before, mentioning that General Carthew and his son were still away, and that I was feeling a bit lonely, and was longing for her company. To this I got a brighter answer than her letters had been of late, saying that she had been wanting me ever since she had left Moor Farm; that she had thought of writing to her stepmother and asking if they could take her in, but that she would not do so now, and was counting the hours till she should see me.

Poor child! how plainly I could read between the lines, as it were. After all, Robin Carthew was right perhaps in banishing himself for awhile.

I was happily busy the next few days preparing for her arrival, decking her dainty bedroom with new draperies, and on the morning on which I expected her I went out and gathered fresh flowers for her table, and selected choice books from my shelves for her sanctum.

Presently as I sat at my open window, I heard carriage-wheels which stopped outside. Nancy must have driven from the station then. She generally preferred walking and leaving her box to be fetched by the cart. For the first time a presentiment of trouble clouded my glad anticipations, and I arose hastily and went out to the porch to meet my child.

"Why, Nancy!" I exclaimed, "what ails you?" as a pale, shadowy likeness of my bonny Nancy came with feeble steps towards me.

"I am rather done up, dear auntie, but your moorland air and your sweet society will soon cure me, I hope. I was so tired that I thought I would be extravagant and drive up in the cab."

She took the arm I offered her, and bent down with her own winning smile to kiss me. But the alteration in her well-nigh unnerved me. However, I did not want to depress her, so I drew her into the house and placed her in an easy chair, and made her drink a glass of milk and eat some rusks before I asked any more questions.

In spite of her attempts at cheerfulness and notwithstanding all my coddling, Nancy did not throw off her listlessness. Everything seemed an effort to her. There was no desire for walks, even to our nearest tor. Her chief pleasure seemed to be to sit in an easy chair at my open window, with work or book, but the books did not appear to interest her, and the work lay idly on her lap. Her appetite too failed sadly.

At last I resolved to ask my friend Dr. Erskine to come out from the town to see her. He came, and looked grave. It might be the

beginning of low fever or of some more serious mischief, he said, and asked me if I had any clue to her nerves having received a shock.

I thought I had, and gave him a hint of the kind, but Nancy was so reserved and had such a knack of turning off personal talk, that I had not ventured to question her about Mr. Carthew, though she had been a week with me. Dr. Erskine ordered her tonics, but said if I could discover that anything was troubling her, the great point would be if possible to remove the trouble, or her health might permanently suffer.

IV.

"WHAT did Dr. Erskine say, auntie?" asked Nancy, when I returned to her, after seeing the doctor off.

"He thinks some trouble is at the root of your illness, and wants me to try and find out what it is," I answered, standing in front of her as she leaned back in my easy chair.

She blushed up at this, but said nothing, and so I went on, making a desperate effort to break down the barrier between us.

"I don't want to blame you, my child, but I think you have treated your old aunt rather unkindly in keeping her out of your confidence so completely," I said rather hesitatingly, for as I said before, I am really shy in touching on these matters.

"Unkindly? Oh! auntie dear, don't say that!" she exclaimed. "It was my own fault, and my own sorrow, why should I worry anyone else with it?"

"Foolish child!" I answered, "to think that your silence shielded us from the trouble. You should have seen Mr. Carthew's face when he found you had left that morning; you should have heard the sad tones of the General's voice as he told me of his son's distress, and his fear that his health would suffer from it; you should have sat here day after day hungering for a word of loving confidence, if you would know, my Nancy, what cruel comfort your silence brought to those you love."

She gazed up at me as I spoke with such an expression of startled surprise in her large dark eyes, and such a tremulous movement of her lips, that my heart yearned over her, and I just knelt down before her and took her in my arms, and then her head fell upon my shoulder, and her frame shook with the violence of her sobs.

But it would do her good, I knew; the ice was broken at last. I did not try to restrain her, but just let her weep on. The passionate sobbing ceased after awhile, and she leaned back in her chair exhausted. I arranged the cushions comfortably for her and left her to compose herself then, while I went and ordered the tea. When I returned she was looking white and exhausted, but there was a smile hovering over her lips, and a light in her eyes, which made me think of the watery pale sunshine we get sometimes after a day of rain.

She beckoned me to come and sit beside her, and whispered,

"Forgive me, auntie, I meant it all for the best; but oh! the comfort it would have been if I had known you had guessed, and could have told you all my trouble."

"Well, child, we will have our tea, and then you shall make a clean breast of it," I said, as the little maid came in with the tray.

And it was just the same old story, of course, with some variations. Mr. Carthew was a hero to my Nancy as his father had been to another foolish maiden long ago.

The best lady in the land would hardly be worthy of his son, in the General's eyes, Nancy thought. And she had the same conviction herself. But she had allowed herself to bask in the sunshine of those wonderful days of undreamed-of bliss, without looking forward, or into her own heart, until that last evening, when she and Mr. Carthew were left to return alone, and then, when he began to talk of the happiness of the past few days, something in his tone or words was just too much for Nancy's self-restraint, and all at once tears, shameful tears, as she called them, poor child, came into her eyes, and would fall; and he saw them, and after that came his avowal of love, and Nancy's emphatic declaration that it could "never be," and her precipitate flight.

"Oh, auntie dear, was it not dreadful that I should have betrayed myself like that? You know what a true, chivalrous gentleman he is; of course he could not help speaking out then. I do not mean that he said one word that was not true; I believe that he did care for me —strange as it seems, but I believe it just because he said it, but he might never have told me had it not been for those shameful tears; and of course it could never be. I, a poor High School teacher, with no home to call my own, save the shelter my Aunt Molly gives me, with no money save what I earn, I, to marry General Carthew's son, and to venture into the high position of Mr. Carthew's wife! Oh, no, it could never be! The mere thought seemed like treachery to them both after all their kindness to me. And I loved them both too well to do them harm. So I thought the only safe way was flight and to bury myself in my work. But I was weaker than I guessed, and the struggle to fix my mind on the examination papers, while my thoughts would fly off to those sunny days on the moors, with a regretful longing which was like a sharp pain, was almost more than I could bear. And I would not tell you, dear. You had fought your own battle bravely years ago, why should I burden you with my troubles now. But oh! the relief to have told you all, and to know that you don't despise me."

"Despise you for giving your heart to a good man who has given you his own? You silly child! just see what trouble you might have saved us all if you had but trusted your old aunt before, instead of keeping your secret to yourself; and as for that battle you refer to,

Nancy, I am inclined to think that both you and I have erred through a mistaken pride."

And so by degrees she began to mend, and we would venture out on our moors again, going a little further each day, as Nancy's strength improved, though she still looked a shadow of her former self. But the Carthews seemed to have passed out of our life, and I wondered sometimes whether history would repeat itself, and Robin would find solace elsewhere, as his father had done before him.

It was August now, hot and bright. Too hot for mid-day walks, so Nancy and I usually rested in the afternoons and took our strolls after an early tea. It was a lovely evening, when, by dint of slow walking and resting on the way, we reached for the first time since her illness our memorable tor.

Nancy was somewhat exhausted by the climb, and leant her head against my shoulder as we sat in our cosy nook, and closed her eyes as though inclined to sleep. I would not disturb her, but sat gazing at my darling's sweet, pure face, paler than it should be, but calm and peaceful with the long dark eyelashes lying on her white cheeks, and little curls of wavy hair straying over her broad forehead.

It was a very still evening, and I felt a sense of restfulness creeping over me, which was very soothing. Suddenly something made me look up, and there, standing in front of us, and looking down upon my Nancy, I saw General Carthew and his son.

Perhaps it was the soothing surroundings which helped me to take so calmly this unlooked-for apparition. I held up my finger and said—

"She is tired, poor child, with the long walk, and it would startle her to see you now. My Nancy has been ill."

But she was not really asleep, and my voice, low as it was, roused her. She started up, and suddenly a brilliant colour flushed her cheeks and drove away the signs of illness completely for the time. There might have been an awkwardness in this unexpected meeting, but Nancy rose to the occasion as she usually does, and exclaimed—

"Oh, auntie! how could you let me be caught almost napping? It is so still, I wonder I did not hear footsteps, even over the soft heather."

"We ought to apologise for coming upon you so suddenly round the corner of the tor," said the General in a polite but I thought rather constrained voice. "But I grieve to hear you have been ill; nothing serious, I hope?"

"Aunt Molly seemed to think so, and I gave myself up to her to be thoroughly spoilt," replied Nancy trying to rally her spirits, "and am rapidly mending, I hope, under her care. But you too have been ill, have you not?" she asked, turning her eyes with a wistful anxiety towards Mr. Carthew, who indeed had altered sadly since last we met.

"I have had rather a sharp return of my Indian fever," he

answered gravely, "and owe my life, humanly speaking, to my father's nursing. It was only out of consideration for him that I consented to come back here again. I am sorry if we have disturbed you, but we will not intrude upon you in the future to annoy you, pray be sure of that, and do not let us drive you away."

I saw my poor Nancy's lips quivering as she looked up into Mr. Carthew's grave, care-worn face, and listened to his formal apology for being where he had at least as good a right as ourselves to be; and I answered for her, guessing that she would fear to trust her voice—

"Indeed, you must not think that your presence here is unwelcome to us," I said; "we are in special need of a little cheerful society now; it was part of Dr. Erskine's prescription for Nancy, and we have been dependent upon each other for society almost entirely since she came back to me nearly a month ago, looking a wreck of her former self. But I am concerned to hear you have been so ill. That accounts for our having lost sight so entirely perhaps of our valued friends?"

I glanced at the General as I spoke for confirmation, but he shook his head, saying—

"No, it was Robin's doing; he would not let me write"—and here there was a break in the General's voice—"even when we thought the end was near. And I could not thwart him then."

A deep flush mounted to Mr. Carthew's forehead as his father spoke, and keeping his eyes fixed on the ground, he said in a low voice—

"It grieved me to the heart to deny my father, but there was one I had to consider even before him, and I could not risk giving her pain."

Oh, why would he not look up, I thought impatiently; surely one glance at Nancy's eyes big with unshed tears would have told him the truth. His father looked and understood, I think, from the glance he exchanged with me as we stood by, longing to help these foolish young people, who seemed so unable to help themselves. And Nancy was silent; how could she speak with those trembling lips, and her chest heaving with suppressed sobs. I began to fear that the strain would be too much for her, and moved swiftly towards her side to put my arm around her for support. But it needed a stronger arm than mine to catch her as she fell almost fainting towards the ground.

Mr. Carthew had looked up at last and seen the deathly whiteness of her face, and her swaying figure, and in a moment his arm was around her, and she was sobbing on his shoulder as if her heart would break, as he knelt beside her on the heather.

It needed but a glance towards the General, and he followed me around the corner of the tor.

"They will do better without us now," I said, as we sauntered leisurely away from them.

"Aye, but how shall we do without them in the years to come?" he asked ruefully. "Come, Aunt Molly, reconsider your decision as

your Nancy will do hers, and let us have a double wedding ere the year be many weeks older."

He said a great deal more which would look silly written down here. But I suppose he must have got his way at last, or how should I be writing this in my own boudoir at Moor Park with my husband busy at his easel in the window, trying to produce some faint representation on paper of the glorious autumn tints of his own woods; while Nancy's merry laugh comes up from the garden below ever and anon, as an interlude to the graver tones of Robin's voice, as they pace to and fro in the October sunshine?

For General Carthew succeeded in purchasing a very pretty place on the moor not far from my rural retreat, and there he carried me off for a quiet honeymoon after our double wedding at our little village church, while the young couple went off to Scotland. Now they have returned to us to make this their home during the remainder of Robin's leave, and seem to be as happy as the day is long. Nancy's languor and listlessness have all disappeared, her malady was evidently a species of heart-disease for which Mr. Carthew was the best doctor. And as his increased illness, although it developed into Indian fever, was due to the same cause, we considered that Nancy would prove his best nurse, and so the impatient gentlemen got their way—as I find they generally do—and a speedy double wedding was arranged.

Poor Nancy! it was long before she could be comforted for the harm which her mistaken though well-meant conduct had done to Robin, and as though to try and make up to him for the grief she caused him, she spoils him now to her heart's content. But I must confess that it seems to agree with him, for his face has lost that worn look which the over-strain of work had left upon it, and wears in its place an expression of supreme content. My Nancy too, I rejoice to see, has not only recovered all, and more than all her former sunshine, but her character seems to deepen and mature daily in the companionship of such a true Christian gentleman as Robin Carthew.

Of the General I cannot trust myself to speak, only I feel that I can never thank God enough for having given me the support and solace of such a companion to help me on through the few remaining years of my pilgrimage, and for permitting me to assist my noble husband, in ever so small a degree, in the philanthropic schemes which occupy so much of his thoughts and time. The lines have indeed fallen unto us in pleasant places, and as he says, the least we can do to show our gratitude is to try and smooth some of the rougher lines in other people's lives, and help them to rise even through and over these roughnesses to higher things.

But he is calling to me from the window to lay aside my writing, and to come out with him to revel in the glory of the autumn woods, so I will bid my quiet confidant good-bye.

LETTERS FROM SOUTH AFRICA.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "In the Lotus-Land," etc., etc.

East London. *June*, 1893.

CARE AMICE,—My last letter was almost taken up with the charms of our long day's drive, the pen having run away with its subject at greater length than I intended.

I scarcely wonder at it. You who have been used to deserts and all their unlimited expanse, look upon these things as a matter of course; they are old familiar friends, and strike no new keynote upon your emotions.

But to those who have lived in narrower grooves—such as our little English isle—these endless tracks are a revelation. Once we thought the world smaller than it is: the distance from pole to pole, the circumference of the globe, which rushes through the air so easily and turns so smoothly on its axis—all this was but a name, an unknown quantity. But once know something of the great Arabian deserts, the vast prairies of South Africa, the boundless, unpeopled tracks of America and Australia, and the world becomes an eternity of space. As far as we are all individually concerned, it is nothing less. No life is long enough for a thorough acquaintance with it. If we would know well and intimately all its high-ways and by-ways, all its people and tongues, this would be a study not of seventy years, but of seventy times seven.

As for the particular drive in question: that little portion of Cape Colony which lies between Grahamstown and King Williamstown, never more than forty miles distant from the sea-coast, but never within sight or sound of the restless waters: it has left upon us a vivid and lasting impression.

Hour after hour we rejoiced in this vast expanse of earth and sky; these breezy undulations, these "green hills far away;" the eye was never satisfied with seeing; those endless undulations were full of rest and repose; the wild flowers here and there would have raised a botanist to the highest point of enthusiasm; the air was so fresh and pure, so sparkling and exhilarating, that we seemed constantly under the influence of champagne.

When all was over even our Surly Solon was forgiven and forgotten, and we were almost glad that we had brought the wild man with his still wilder gun so far on his road; though probably those who eventually received their crumpled letters, desecrated love-tokens and ruined wedding-cake, would have consigned him to worse quarters than Coventry.

Vividly as anything in our memory remained the Kaffir kraals, the dark, uncivilised people squatting round their holocaust, whilst the ascending flames lighted up their faces until they looked like demons incarnate—and perhaps were actually nearly related to them.

Only one thing was wanting to complete the picture: they should have sprung up at our approach and commenced a war dance, and greeted us with wild whoops and frenzied gestures, so that we might have had the pleasure of a new sensation: chilling our blood still more than the night air. And for ever stamped in the memory as a hideous nightmare were those wretched painted objects wandering away into the solitary wilderness, wrapped in their dark blankets, which, fancy said, might well be their winding-sheet. Of course it was nothing of the sort, but as we passed they seemed to give us an appealing look of despair, as if pleading for a reprieve it was in our power to grant. Fancy again, but with all the air, and all the effect upon us, of reality.

What a delight to spend six months amidst all these wild and desert solitudes; to go far up into the interior, where few have penetrated: especially if, like H., one saw an Elysium in lion-hunting. For in this our little drive, out of the world as it appeared, we were really within call so to say of crowds of our fellow-creatures; in well-beaten tracks traversed day by day by post-carts and other nondescript vehicles. We were not likely to come upon any new discoveries, anything strange and unknown to startle the world and set it wondering. Nevertheless, to us it was new and interesting, and contained all the elements of freedom and grandeur: and in going further up country we hoped to find more of these experiences.

But when we saw the lights of King Williamstown flashing in the distance, we were not sorry. Darkness had fallen; the earth had put on her mysterious mantle; everything was wrapped in solemn silence; we were chilled otherwise than by war whoops, frenzied dances and cruel holocausts. Some nine hours had passed since the friendly and philosophic landlord at Breakfast Vlei had reproached us with an insubstantial meal: and his words were coming home with keen sensations. So when a sharp turn to the right brought us into the final road, and the lights grew larger and more numerous, we rejoiced greatly.

The town at last. The wild man with his gun recklessly jumped off as we entered and we saw him no more; we felt we had escaped a great danger; the letter-bags looked crushed and subdued and limp, and no doubt felt very much sat upon; they had not altogether escaped.

The post-cart made straight for the Commercial Hotel, where our three passengers of the back seat alighted; and because we two desired to be taken to other quarters, Surly Solon turned more surly still, and intimated that if the Commercial was not good enough for us, we might wait his pleasure at the Post Office.

So nothing loth we went round the town in all the glory and triumph of a post-cart, four horses and crushed letter-bags, and felt like other Cæsars entering Rome crowned with laurels. To give Surly Solon his due, he kept us waiting very few minutes at the Post Office, but we felt it was fear of too close an inspection of crushed letter-bags, and not consideration for his long-suffering passengers.

Finally our turn came, and we drew up in the neighbourhood of an hotel, surrounded, as it seemed in the darkness, by groves of beautiful trees countless and endless. Sweet scents filled the air, and within the groves a dazzling light sent forth a multitude of rays from a palatial-looking structure, all towers and bells and pagodas, whence flowed sweet strains of music. We afterwards found that under cover of the darkness we had imagined most of this. The hotel was called Utopia, and we wondered whether this was Arcady. A waiter came out, politely welcomed us, assured us that we should receive lordly accommodation and regal fare; we wished Surly Solon health and reformation as our only parting benediction, and with anything but feelings of regret watched the darkness swallow him up.

Then we crossed one of the groves of Arcady, entered the inn, and were absorbed in the light of what seemed to us, after the darkness of the drive, the splendour of a special royal illumination. A landlady, fat, fair, and certainly fifty, came forward and received us with a court curtsey, quite in keeping with the conceit: and addressing one of us as "My lord," and the other as "Your grace" we felt that here indeed was confusion worse confounded. But we afterwards knew that it was only her way: a peculiar idiosyncracy whereby she kept up the impression in her own mind that she was only patronised by the cream of society. And though hating Radicalism from the depths of my heart, and a Tory to the backbone, I could not help thinking that on a closer acquaintance with "my lords" and "your graces," she would find a good many of them only very poor skim milk, though I would not disillusion her by telling her so. For ourselves, we felt that for once in our lives we were appreciated.

A closer acquaintance with these halls of Eblis a little subdued and corrected our first impressions. Towers and pagodas, incense and sweet music seemed to vanish like the fairyland of a dissolving view. We found in place an old-fashioned inn, comfortable, full of strange passages, turnings and staircases, as if for the last hundred years every fresh tenant had altered, added and improved, each according to his own idea of construction and adornment. It was therefore impossible to say that the architecture was either Norman, Early English, or Gothic. Transition it certainly was, and Perpendicular, but after the gale very shortly encountered, both these features very possibly disappeared for ever, and founded a new Horizontal School.

At present there was no sign of the storm that was brewing.

Our hostess marshalled us upstairs, excusing herself if she turned her back upon us, as the stairs were too steep to be comfortably ascended any other way. The candles, which she carried well raised, threw lights and shadows about, and illumined the pictures on the walls. These of course were all of Royalty, or of persons so near the throne that, like the inn itself, they were merely in a transition state.

The disposition of the upper floor was perplexing. We went through a number of tiny passages which reminded one of fair Rosamund's Maze: but if we expected to find a fair Rosamund

LIGHTHOUSE AT PORT ELIZABETH.

we deceived ourselves. Our regal landlady was the very essence of propriety and went in strongly for *les convenances*. In this we naturally upheld her, though feeling that our march was like acting the play of 'Hamlet' with Ophelia left out; but that was as it should be. Rooms of the best were given to us; small, but the pink of perfection in the way of cleanliness and beautiful white linen, and large windows for the admission of light and air. We expressed our contentment, and asked if there was a silken string to guide us to and fro. An equivalent was provided, by which means we presently found ourselves in the dining-room, one end of which had been lighted up for our benefit.

Here I think we both proved that whatever else had degenerated since the days of Hamlet and Horatio, the power of doing justice to baked meats, funeral or festive, would not be catalogued, especially when they were excellent as these. Hunger, they say, is the best sauce for flavouring, and if that be so, no wonder we found everything in the dining-room corresponded with our first impressions of this Utopian abode.

"The next time appetite fails, I shall take a fourteen hours' drive," said H., attacking his eighth course with delightful energy; whilst the exhausted waiter retired into the shadowy part of the room and sank into a chair for ten minutes' interval of rest (and possibly refreshment), feeling that now indeed he had himself duly qualified for the land of shadows. We, on the contrary, less shadowy than of late, presently went forth to make some slight acquaintance with King Williamstown under a starlit sky.

Forsaking Utopia and the Arcadian groves, we passed into the more commonplace atmosphere of an ordinary South African settlement. Not that anything looked commonplace to-night, for when darkness spreads her mantle, she refines and beautifies the most ordinary elements. The evening was calm and still; not a sign, not the softest murmur, of the fearful hurricane that in less than twelve hours would be sowing desolation broadcast. The sky was cloudless; stars flashed with unusual brilliancy in dark blue heavens; all the constellations of this Southern Hemisphere were conspicuous: the disappointing Southern Cross, the graceful Northern Crown, and before all, the magnificent Scorpion. All were travelling onwards in that silent majestic march which began we know not when, and perhaps is destined to go on for ever.

We had very little earthly light to guide us: King Williamstown was evidently thrifty, and, unlike Utopia, spared its illumination. Perhaps this only added to the weird effect, the sense of mystery, which haunted the long, straight, deserted thoroughfares. It was evidently far more business-looking, and probably richer and more flourishing, than Grahamstown, which we had so lately left. The one might be said to be distinguished by an ecclesiastical atmosphere, the other by a commercial. The latter pays best no doubt, and as commerce seems to be the backbone of a nation, we must render homage where it is due. Yet, if we had to pitch our tent, it should be in the ecclesiastical and legal town, with its military traditions to cover all with a slight halo of romance, the pensive atmosphere that surrounds all things that have been.

Like other towns of South Africa, King Williamstown has very much improved and expanded. It has almost painfully straight streets, some of them lined with trees, but in the darkness these cast no picturesque shadows. Large, low, well-built houses, many of stone, testified to successful industry, for most of them bore the names of well-known firms. Some of these firms have also houses

at East London, and the one town is largely dependent upon the other.

To-night all was closed; everything was steeped in that silence and repose which seemed a faint reflection of the silence and repose of the far-off stars.

One is always struck by these contrasts. Go through the city of London at midday, and note its countless hurrying crowd toiling and struggling in its little brief authority. Visit the same scene twelve hours later, when midnight chimes upon the air. The contrast is almost appalling, and brings home with wonderful force that, We are but shadows, and phantoms we pursue. Solemn and quiet and full of warning are the churches with their towers and spires grimly outlined against the sky. Hushed and portentous the "old lady of Threadneedle Street," whose massive walls and doors are closed to all those night hawks who would penetrate to her subterranean coffers. The silence is painful and startling. Every street is deserted: no sound to be heard excepting the vibration of the last midnight chime dying upon the air. Not a human being visible, other, it may be, than a distant guardian of the city, throwing mysterious gleams into courts and grated doorways: but even he, not breaking the stillness by the cry of his ancestor: "Past twelve o'clock and a cloudy morning." That picturesque old figure with its gloomy announcement has departed with the ghosts and customs of antiquity. The light of other days has faded. And that hurrying crowd we saw at midday, where are they? Scattered north, south, east and west; steeped in slumber; dreaming of to-morrow's possibilities, next year's chances; building Spanish castles that will never have anything but a dream existence.

But the city of London is a very far cry from King Williamstown, and at the moment of which we are writing they only resembled each other in darkness and repose and the starry heavens. Probably even at midday there is no great sense of hurry and bustle. Time is still long enough for them out here, and things are not done with a rush. We had introductions, but they could hardly be delivered so near midnight; the most amiable of hosts would have said: "A time for all things;" and so we saw only the outside of these substantial tenements. Few lights gleamed anywhere. It is a new country and its people remember the old maxim and act up to it. Healthy and wise, they are growing wealthy also.

King Williamstown like East London is situated on the Buffalo River; the one at the mouth, the other some forty miles up on the left bank of the stream. Here, too, we are at the foot of the Amatola Mountains, but of these we saw nothing in the darkness.

We walked the round we had taken in the post-cart, and saw that the public buildings were numerous. The post office was now closed; near it the railway station was steeped in darkness and repose; in the neighbourhood were several churches, the handsomest of all being the

Roman Catholic. Above the entrance to the clock tower was a brass tablet to the memory of the Rev. John Brownlee; who near here founded the first mission station in British Kaffraria, and so commenced that work of Christianising that great population of uncivilised Kaffirs, of whom we had seen a few specimens in our long and interesting drive. The work makes slow progress, but no doubt will go on with greater strides as the prosperity of South Africa increases.

An institution near the station—the Grey Hospital—is designed, by supplying proper doctors, to diminish the number and influence of those terrible "witch doctors," who are the cause of endless cruelty, torture and death.

In the large market-place, booths were erected, numberless covered carts stood about and oxen were patiently passing the night, or waiting to be stalled elsewhere. The morrow was evidently to be a fair, or a weekly market; or it might be that these waggons were travelling through the country, and had encamped until the morning. Perhaps their drivers, with the spirit of divination, knew that the greatest storm within the memory of man was about to fall upon them. It all looked curious under the night sky, looming out dimly in the darkness; the singularly shaped "square" seemed exaggerated in size, and the cattle were the embodiment of long-suffering patience.

For King Williamstown, or "King" as it is generally called, is a place of some importance in the Colony, and is associated with East London, where it comes into touch with the far-off world. It is the head-quarters of the Cape Mounted Rifles and the Cape Police. Its very situation is also in its favour, for it is surrounded by rich pasture lands, and some of the best farms in the country are in this neighbourhood. This might account for the crowd of carts and cattle in the square. On these occasions King cannot be at its best, for cattle fairs are the most unpleasant things under the sun.

The immediate neighbourhood seemed very pretty and rural. We soon wandered away from the houses and found ourselves in a long straight road, with many beautiful trees about it, and the English church—an imposing building for South Africa—at the end. Forms were flitting about the churchyard, and in the dead of night we naturally thought of ghosts and went up to reconnoitre. But as they cast shadows they could not be shadows themselves, and so we left them to it, much offended at the deception. They were still in the flesh, and perhaps enjoyed melancholy meditations amongst the tombs. People have different ideas of happiness.

Here in King Williamstown we were in the neighbourhood of the forests for which the Amatola Mountains are famous. It is a good sign where there are forests, for the surrounding country is almost invariably rich and fertile; and if the forests are allowed to disappear, the land becomes poor and unfruitful.

The forests of South Africa are both beautiful and extensive, but small compared with what they were in primitive ages, when there

A KAFFIR KRAAL : IN WINTER COSTUME.

seems to be evidence that all the mountains were clothed with timber. In those days the country must indeed have presented a rich and charming appearance.

Certain trees are indigenous to certain parts of the country.

Thus on the slopes of Table Mountain you find the beautiful silver tree, and I am not aware that it is found anywhere else. The oak grows in all parts of South Africa, but is best in more rainy regions of the West. Here the foliage is twice as dense as that of the English oak, the acorn twice as large, and it grows twice as rapidly. In spring it bursts suddenly into leaf, and at that time a South African oak forest is one of earth's most beautiful and refreshing sights. The oak of the Cape Peninsula is said to be the finest in the world.

The cluster pine is also largely found, and is the same species as the maritime pine of France.

The eucalyptus or blue gum was introduced in 1828, and is now to be found everywhere, cultivated both by public and private enterprise on account of its healing qualities and its tendency to keep away fevers. It is also very much used for firewood, and gives out a pleasanter scent than the extract.

In the neighbourhood of the Amatola Mountains, which brings us to King Williamstown, the forests are largely made up of sneeze-wood, yellow-wood, and stink-wood or laurel-wood. The latter name is the more graceful, but the former is generally adopted, and is derived from the fact that when first cut it gives out a very pungent odour. Sneeze-wood is so called from the fact, that in sawing, as the sawdust flies, the men are attacked by violent fits of sneezing. But like most things, they grow accustomed to it, when it ceases to affect them. As the French say, *Il faut payer son tribut.* The wild lemon grows here, and throws out a delicate and delicious scent upon the air.

The yellow-wood is the largest of all trees and is of two species: the Outeniqua and the Upright, the former being gigantic, the latter about half the size. Yellow-wood is much used in domestic architecture; for flooring, beams, and railway sleepers. It is largely made up into furniture. The tree is met with more than any other; and a yellow-wood forest is the finest of all sights, with its enormous trunks and spreading branches. One famous specimen measures twenty-three feet round, and is eighty feet high.

The laurel-wood is not unlike an oak tree, and like the yellow-wood is much used domestically. But it is a finer sort, and is employed for more ornamental purposes. The finest cabinets are made of laurel-wood, and command a higher price than oak, walnut, or mahogany. The grain is singularly rich and beautiful, and polishes magnificently. It has many good qualities; the root is almost imperishable, and the more the tree is cut down, the faster fresh shoots spring up. Thus it seems everlasting and ever-producing, and if it were more cultivated—as it will be by-and-by—it would be known

and valued all over the world. The leaf, strange to say, of this tree with the unromantic name, is peculiarly spicy and aromatic, and leaves a pleasant taste of cinnamon in the mouth. Perhaps it, too, could be used for domestic purposes.

A South African Waterfall.

Sneeze-wood is the most imperishable of all, and ranks with the Jarrah and Greenheart of other countries: the Greenheart or poisonous wood, with its lovely grain, apparently so strong that it might last for ever, and defy the action of the most troubled seas. What a contrast to the American elm, which is used with it side by

side, but has no grain or beauty of its own. Sneeze-wood is almost indestructible. It is a somewhat small tree, and until its properties were known, was used as firewood, though every log that was burnt was said to be worth its weight in gold.

So the forests of South Africa should not be allowed to disappear, as they have in the past, but as they will not in future. For now the forests of Cape Colony are all public property, and are in charge of the Forest Department: a far more important department than at first sight seems evident, and one that should be closely followed up. In all countries where the forests have disappeared, it has been to the detriment and impoverishing of the people; and in South Africa as we have said, in each case the land, no matter how fertile, has become barren. Forest fires have been largely destructive.

Thus nothing in South Africa is more beautiful than its forest scenery, a little of which I described to you on the journey from Port Elizabeth to Grahamstown: all that amazing wealth of colouring and vegetation which made our progress a dream and a romance. All those gorgeous flowers, those wonderful tree-ferns, those gigantic creepers which from the very tops of the trees drooped to the ground in luxuriant profusion, and spread from tree to tree and from branch to branch, and made fairy bowers for Titania. To these must often be added the magnificent and blossoming chestnut and the singularly beautiful and scented *vleir*.

In the neighbourhood of the forests streams of water usually abound and add much to the charm of the landscape; those near the Amatolas and King Williamstown being exceedingly clear and sparkling.

Such are the matchless glories of earth. Imagine for a moment these far-off untrodden wilds, these mighty solitudes, where sparkling streams for ever make music, and vegetation is rich and abundant; where gorgeous blooms dazzle the vision, and a brilliant atmosphere exhilarates you to fever heat, and endless giants of the forest rear their heads heavenwards; that heaven the bluest and purest that can be conceived. If one could only fly over and alight in the centre of one of these solitudes, and like Thoreau revel in the rich charms of nature and make friends with everything that breathes and moves and has its being; where birds would come at one's call and fishes would swim to one's whistle: and at the end of a couple of months of unbroken sunshine and happiness such as the world cannot give, fly back to that world, and duty, and harness, ready for work and strong for battle. Imagine what it would be if one only could do this!

But we must leave these charming forest solitudes, and return to King Williamstown and Utopia, for which hospitable abode we made after satisfying ourselves that the churchyard phantoms were not ghosts, but only melancholy members of society playing at hide-and-seek amidst the graves. It was time we re-entered the groves of

Arcady. After such a day, too, a certain amount of rest was necessary. We had been travelling some eighteen hours, and began to realise that the human frame is only a limited liability machine: a fact we most of us too often forget.

So we passed down the long tree-lined road, in the darkness of night, and heard no sound, and saw neither ghost nor mortal. Thus unaccompanied we returned to Utopia, the only bright spot in the town at this witching hour. For the lights were still flashing, and in the "bar-parlour"—oh, that we should have to chronicle anything so vulgar and mundane of Utopia—the regal Rowena awaited us with reverences and refreshments. But they were works of supererogation, for we had dined well and wisely; and so with good-nights, quite as sincere as Shelley's but less affectionate, we made straight for the maze, and by some lucky inspiration found our way to our bowers undisturbed by such incidents as befell Mr. Pickwick. We needed no sleeping draughts, and were in oblivion almost before the head touched the pillow.

But it was not to last.

Presently we were awakened by the most awful sounds that ever struck upon mortal ear in the dead of night. If a company of unhappy ghosts had assembled outside our windows, and concentrated in one night the groans and agonies of a century, they could not have been more dreadful. What it was we never found out, but it was no dream or delusion. We never heard such expressions of pain, horror, and despair, and they continued more or less until dawn broke in the East.

We intended on coming down the next morning to ask an explanation of these hideous sounds; but time pressed, and in the hurry of breakfast and getting off to the train, the incident for the moment was forgotten. The cries were neither human nor Christian; perhaps they were Kaffir: the ghost of some poor creature tortured to death by a "witch doctor." If so to haunt us and not the true culprit was a clear miscarriage of justice; for certainly if it were in our power, the reign of these terrible witch-doctors should cease for ever. But before this comes to pass much has to be done in the way of civilising and Christianising. Superstition lingers longest, even in the human heart of the Kaffir. It is the dread of the unknown or the unseen, the possible but the uncertain; and because it is intangible as a shadow, so like a shadow it is dreaded.

We found King Williamstown by daylight very much what it had seemed under the night stars. There was a difference of course. All the poetry had vanished, and it looked more or less commonplace, after the manner of most towns distinguished by such ordinary materials as bricks and mortar: though there was more stone than brick in many of the houses, and they were so much the more dignified. But the groves of Arcady—where were they? Vanished into thin air, or into clusters of trees that could hardly be called

Arcadia. And the courtly, curtseying hostess, where was she? Either not in existence, which was clearly impossible, or so disturbed by the horrors of the night that she could not this morning rival Venus and shine as a morning star.

The Square was still full of carts and cattle; these unromantic details at least were no illusion. And yet a country cart is not without its romance if one will associate it with the family fortunes. It may be only a humble Dolly and Kitty; it may be the more lovely Minna and Brenda, or the more sad and sorrowful Juliet and Ophelia: whoever and whatever they may be, the country cart is surrounded by their atmosphere. You see their charming faces peering out from the canvas, and hear their silvery voices vibrating upon the air.

The railway station was not very bustling this morning, and we were soon settled in our compartment: our only fellow-traveller a lady who lived in East London, and whose newspaper, before the end of the journey, I calmly and coolly appropriated under the impression that it was my own. Unfortunately she alighted at a siding, and the error was only found out when we reached the station proper; when I was horrified at remembering how I had quietly stretched across, deliberately folded up the newspaper under her interested gaze, and put it into my pocket. What she thought of me I have often wondered, but she must have been a "real lady," for she said nothing, and gave us a cordial farewell and good wishes before she courageously jumped the ten feet that separated the ground from the footboard—into the arms of the guard. She seemed none the worse for this, but like a dove or a pigeon or a lady-fowl, shook out her rumpled feathers, laughed back at us, and jauntily departed.

We had scarcely left King Williamstown—to go back to it for a moment—before we saw signs of rough weather.

In the first place, the sky, to our grief and sorrow, was heavily overcast. I need not say how much difference this made to our actual enjoyment: under grey skies one cannot feel hilarious—unless of those who love to go by the rules of contrary. It was also blowing so hard, that at every moment the wind seemed to gain strength and fury. At last, getting nearer the coast, it once or twice threatened to overturn the train. We crawled and stopped, and stopped and dawdled until we were very soon an hour behind time: and long before reaching East London had passed the hour for sailing. This made one a little anxious: though we had a "trusty friend" on board, whose word was law, and who certainly would never leave us in the lurch. Still, as I said before, human nature has its limitations.

"Rough weather," said our lady-passenger, when a more violent blast than usual shook the train to its centre.

"A perfect hurricane," we returned. "Do you often have such gales as this?"

"I have frequently known it as bad as this, but if it goes on increasing it will be phenomenal."

On the Buffalo River.

At that moment a terrific burst came which turned us over to an angle of forty-five degrees. Then a blast which seemed to come from the other side turned us back again. The lady-passenger shrieked.

"Well, really," she said, apologising, "I am not given to hysterics, but this is such a new experience. If it goes on, we shall soon be in the position of Mahomet's coffin, lifted bodily into the air."

"Then if we are carried out to sea," suggested H., "let us hope the gale will be merciful enough to land us on the decks of the *Dunottar*."

"The *Dunottar*," shrieked the lady passenger; "you don't mean to say you are bound for the *Dunottar?* You'll never reach her."

"But we must reach her," we returned in desperation. "It is an absolute obligation."

"Ah, sir," returned the lady passenger, with convincing calmness, "you don't know East London. *Must* is not in its vocabulary, and as for obligations—you might as well talk Greek to a Zulu and expect him to understand you. My only astonishment is—and it is the astonishment of a good many—that the Castle Packet Line calls here at all. The vessels lose more time in coming here and run more risk than they do during all the rest of the voyage put together. It has a harbour bar, and too often it is a bar to any outgoing or incoming, if you'll excuse a pun on such a solemn occasion. My husband is at the Bar—but only in a legal sense. East London, I tell you, knows no *must*, and recognises no obligation. For rough weather it is the worst harbour in all South Africa—perhaps in the whole world; and all because they didn't make the breakwater long enough. It is quite a common thing for all traffic to be stopped for days, and for half such a gale as this. A hurricane indeed! No, sirs, there will be no *Dunottar* for you to-day. You will have to put up with the miseries of an hotel."

"And which is the best hotel?" we asked in a very forlorn way.

"They are all equally bad," she laughed. "You see I am forced to be a Job's comforter; but really I must tell the truth. There's not one of them much above a superior public-house. If my husband were at home," she added with frank hospitality, "I should only be too happy to ask you to put up with us; but as I have told you, he's a barrister, and just now has an important case on at Durban; and being away he might not quite like it; but at least we might have made your stay less uncomfortable than I fear it will be. Nay, sir, it would be a kindness to ourselves. You know not how pleasant it is to tender hospitality to those who have come straight from the home-country—to which our hearts always cling, no matter if we have been out here for a century. Ah!" with another shriek and another blast, "Mahomet's coffin at last."

But though it was very terrific, we remained on *terra firma;* and very soon after we reached the siding, where our amiable traveller gracefully jumped her ten feet into the arms of the polite and

ecstatic guard, and we went on to the principal station. He did not offer us the same civility.

Here we found things not one whit exaggerated. The wind was literally blowing great guns—the largest guns ever made; the dust was racing about and cut one's face as it whirled. The clouds were dark and lowering, and rushed and rolled in a double current across the heavens, threatening every moment to come down in a deluge. At least, we thought, it would lay this awful dust, and perhaps bring down wind and waves. Our traps were put into an omnibus in waiting, and we were very soon struggling through the streets to the hotel, swaying to and fro very much like a boat at sea.

Safely arrived, we found our traveller's account a true one. The hotel was noisy, uncomfortable and badly managed. To make things worse, stress of weather had crowded it with a loud, rough set of people, whose pleasure in life seemed to be to elbow others out of it. But we were helpless. The only rooms we could secure were wretched, dark, and unwholesome; the only consolation we received was hearing there was a chance of getting off in the afternoon. But either they must have known better, or it was an instance of hoping against hope.

No sooner settled than suddenly the rain came down as if the whole force of the storm had broken over our heads. The noise it made was extraordinary; the sight, in spite of the discomfort it brought us almost grand. It was literally one sheet of water, through which nothing on the other side the road could be seen. The very strength of its fury caused it to be more quickly spent. In half an hour it suddenly ceased, but only to gather strength for another downpour.

Meanwhile we had reconnoitred our surroundings, and found them neither refined nor exhilarating. The state of the atmosphere was anything but warm and genial, and the house seemed built for the purpose of testing one's capacity for draughts. They flew up and down the passages and in and out of doors in the most frolicsome and persistent manner. There was no escaping them. Near the entrance was the "bar parlour" where draughts of another sort were equally in force, and much more popular. Very rough-and-ready specimens of humanity, many tongues and people, surrounded us. We heard a little English with which we were familiar, and a good deal of English we had never heard before: South Africans, possibly, born and bred in the bush or the Karroo, who had learned an accent and a tone which were neither the fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring of voice and speech. Natives whom the diamond-mines or the gold-fields had suddenly brought out of the obscurity of generations into wealthy evidence. For many were more than well-to-do; they were rich, and could come over to England if they liked, and buy up large properties and live *en prince*. But they do not like. Homes, hearts and associations are over there, and there they stay

and are happy after their own manner. There seemed a good deal of fraternity amongst them, and good-natured bantering; a tilting of words which seldom disturbed the social atmosphere.

The great topic of conversation was of course the physical atmosphere; and many crowded round the front door, and gazed upon the wonder, and looked at each other, and asked whether it was the end of the world or another deluge, declaring they "had never seen the like." It was evident, too, that some had had a great experience, living and sleeping half their days up country in the open air. They were not men to be easily intimidated or to hesitate at a drenching if business carried them abroad. But they drew the line here, and hesitated to brave this unfamiliar fury. It was something "beyond their ken."

We soon discovered there was neither system, nor order, nor management in the hotel. Everyone had to look out for himself, and those who were backward in doing so, were, as we have said, "elbowed out of the race for life." The inn was not equal to the unwonted demand upon its resources, and the waiting was like a game at snap-dragon: some were fortunate and others dined with Duke Humphrey. To us, this was no great matter; whether we dine or whether we do not, life goes on just as smoothly, though we might think the condition a little trying if often repeated; but to these descendants of Hercules, these sons of Anak, with immense appetites and capacities, it was a serious affair, the great event of the day; a day without dinner was a day lost for ever. But the back is fitted to the burden; these were the self-asserters, who came in for double portions: and, as if fate would reward their energy and shower favours on them with both hands, these are the men who find the largest nuggets in the gold-fields.

To go back to "the mist and the rain."

Its unparalleled fury continued for half an hour, and then suddenly ceased. For a time the atmosphere cleared; there was almost a suspicion of sunshine; the clouds found their reflection in the flooded roads.

We sallied forth, and in mackintoshes and travelling caps looked as if we had cast in our lot with the fraternity just described. To escape from the inn and the rough element was relief unspeakable. The open air was delightful.

The thoroughfares of East London are broad, long and straight; the houses are well built and substantial, and like most houses in South Africa, not high; a great thing in their favour. Who would build houses of ten and fifteen stories excepting such islands as England and such crowded thoroughfares as London? There are wide squares, too, in which it is possible to breathe; and on such days, the glorious expanse of sky and the wealth of sunshine alone make life worth living. Given a sufficiency of air, sky and sunshine and the world is a paradise and life is Elysium.

KING WILLIAMSTOWN.

We directed our steps to a point where we could command the sea. It might be heard thundering upon the beach from all parts of the town, but we wished to see it also: a wish soon gratified. Such a boiling, raging, witch's cauldron we had seldom looked upon. Gigantic waves broke upon the shore and shook the very foundations of the earth. Over the breakwater, sea after sea broke with such force that we were astonished to find the waves swirl off, leaving the stones still standing one upon another. The sight was magnificent and sublime, and if we never before realised the mighty strength of the ocean, we did then.

And there, not far off, was the *Dunottar Castle*, riding boldly upon the raging waters, looking as peaceful and orderly as a midsummer calm, beautiful as a midsummer night's dream: a haven of refuge; paradise and Elysium all rolled into one in comparison with our present quarters. Not a movement on board; not a sound came from her: she seemed the abode of peace and happiness; a perfect Agapemone. We made frantic signs; went through all the signal alphabet with our umbrellas hoping to be observed; feeling that a response would mean, "We have our eyes upon you and do not mean to forsake you:" but no answer came; everyone was down below at tiffin and champagne, sublimely unconscious of the miserable beings on shore.

Fearing a repetition of the deluge, we hastened to the office of the Castle Packet Company, where an unsympathetic set of gentlemen stared with mild eyes at our anxious inquiries, and presently condescended to remark that everything was uncertain.

On asking whether the *Dunottar* was likely to sail without us, the manager replied that he had signalled for her to remain, but that as Captain Robinson was master of his own ship, he could not tell what would happen. This was comforting, for we knew that if Captain Robinson could possibly remain, he would certainly not sail without us. We found, too, that we were not alone in misfortune. Forty other fellow-sufferers and anxious inquirers, were weeping and wailing about the town, waiting for the going down of the waters; longing to get on board the *Dunottar* and proceed to Durban.

We departed from the unsympathetic atmosphere of this office, and returned to the hotel just in time to escape another terrific squall and deluge. It came down with as much fury as ever.

In this manner the day wore on. The hours dragged as they never had dragged before, but the longest lane has its turning. Between each deluge we went forth into the town, glad of the escape, the rest and repose. The intervals fortunately grew longer. During one of them we went down to the harbour and the breakwater, venturing as far as the boiling sea made it possible. Here we felt in a new and delightful element. Picturesque vessels and small steamers were alongside, glad of their safe quarters; the quays

were laden with timber and other merchandise; well-built sheds ran along the harbour, and between them and the water stood many railway trucks. Here and there a great crane reared its head. It was the usual picturesque scene; for there is something delightfully suggestive and artistic in the mere outlines of a boat. Where will you see a prettier sight than a Thames barge quietly going out into broad reaches of the stream, with brown sails set to the breeze. Its outlines, cutting the clear sky, would be hard to equal in perfection of form and beauty.

This harbour is at the mouth of the Buffalo River, and for some distance up is a very lovely sight. A wealth of trees and verdure lines the sloping banks; and in sunny weather, it is one of the prettiest experiences in South Africa: reminding one, on a larger scale, of the beauty of some of our Devonshire rivers: the Dart, the

Travelling in South Africa.

Fal, and the stream on which quaint little Fowey is built. We had been especially advised to do this river, but to-day it was out of the question. On the other side of the harbour the signal cone was raised to its highest, and though the rain was good enough to cease at intervals, the wind only grew stronger. It looked a very pretty spot across the river, near the cone and the harbour office; quite a colony of small houses or bungalows reposing on a sloping sand-bank, their picturesque red roofs full of colouring which harmonised wonderfully with the surroundings. We wondered what brought the colony there, and later on we were told.

We revelled in this port element and returned to it again and again, taking refuge in a shed or an empty truck or behind a crane if a deluge surprised us. So the day wore on to night; and at night we were told that the storm was abating and probably we should be

able to go off the next morning. Even Job's comforters were better than this, for they never raised false hopes.

Accordingly at five o'clock, before it was light, a servant awakened us with the information that we were to depart. From our rooms we heard the distant sea thundering upon the beach; the wind seemed to blow with greater force than ever; the rain still came down in a deluge. We wondered, but nothing doubting, dressed joyfully, and turned out into the cold and wet, and with some dozen other passengers were packed like cattle in a cart and taken down to the harbour. There we stayed for an hour or two, shivering and shaking; having had no breakfast, a far more important consideration than dinner; only to find that the whole thing had been a false alarm, a delusion, or a practical joke. There had never been the slightest chance or possibility of getting off to the *Dunottar*. Anything more disgracefully managed on the part of the hotel, or the office of the Company, or both, never was heard of; anything more cruel and inhuman. We thus began another wretched day under the most trying and uncomfortable circumstances that could possibly be imagined, and several miserable hours earlier than we need have done.

So again the hours dragged their slow length away, and we bewailed many a time the fate that had taken our amiable fellow-traveller's husband to Durban. Had we only known her name and address, we should certainly have gone to her for consolation, and so passed more happily at least some of the hours of the day. We would even have gone back to King Williamstown and Utopia, but in the uncertainty of wind and weather this was impossible.

Necessity has no law and we bore with the infliction. In the afternoon we found ourselves again at our beloved harbour, took ferry, crossed to the other side, and made our way to the office of the harbour-master. His amiability and genial good temper, a readiness to give us all the information he could, his sympathy with our state of uncertainty and discomfort—all this was the first bright and pleasant element we had found in East London. If the office of the Company had only condescended to give us a tenth part of the information we should have known what to do and what to expect. But it was not their pleasure.

"As to the element of uncertainty," said the harbour-master, "it does not at present exist, and has not existed since the gale sprang up. If you were called out of your beds this morning it was a piece of unnecessary cruelty, and had they come to me I could have told them so. Inquiries ought to have been made. There never was the slightest chance of your going off to the vessel. There will be none to-day."

"And to-morrow?"

"Ah, to-morrow! who knows what the morrow may bring forth? At the present moment the gale is as strong as ever, but it must go down sometime."

"If there is the least improvement, don't you think you could manage to release us from our uncomfortable quarters?"

"Uncomfortable as they may be, sir, I think you would find the bottom of the sea still more so," laughed the harbour-master. "You may depend upon it I shall not send you off before I should be willing to go off myself; and I should be very sorry to attempt it at the present moment. I will say this, however: I was quite certain you would not get off this morning; there never was any doubt about it: but I do think it possible that to-morrow morning may release you. I think I see symptoms of improvement."

This was encouraging. We asked what the little colony of red-roofed houses at our feet meant. They looked more picturesque than ever as we looked down upon them from our perch in the harbour-master's office.

"That," he replied, "is the original East London; and there the new East London ought to have been built; but for some reason they chose the other side of the harbour. You will find nothing there as old and as interesting as these small houses.

We quite agreed with him. His own small house just below us, in warm and sunny weather, must be a charming spot. Even to-day its warm red of the right tone, looked bright and cheerful; the pleasantest place in the whole settlement; and within a few yards the sea broke and thundered and threw up mountains of spray. We had seldom seen such a sight, and as I have said, but for our wretched quarters we should have revelled and gloried in it.

"Ay, sir," said the harbour-master, in answer to a remark, "it is a very fine sight indeed. And familiarity does not breed contempt, for I enjoy the grandeur of every fresh storm as much as though I had never seen one before. But it has its sad side too. It is greedy of its prey: it is a hungry sea, always asking for more victims, and getting them. I never look at a tempest raging as this one, but I think of the old Scotch song: 'Caller herrin'? Call them lives o' men.'"

We were sorry to part with our harbour-master, who seemed full of life and quiet energy, frank and straightforward; the only pleasant specimen of humanity we had found in this benighted place. "Good-bye, sirs," he said, as we shook hands. "If you want to know more about the weather, come down to-night. I'll do my best for you to-morrow morning, and give you the benefit of a hope, though not of a doubt. But the elements are not in my keeping, remember, and I cannot say to the sea, so far shalt thou go and no farther. It wouldn't obey me any more than it obeyed old Canute the Dane."

We went on to the pier, sheltered on this side from the fury of the sea. And there we stood or sat long and looked out upon the wide waste of waters, enjoying the solitude, the magnificence of the waves that came swiftly rolling in one upon another. The sound was terrific. The wind rushed past us with the roar of cannon, joining

its voice to the thunder of the waves. Dark and grey were the waters, black and lowering the clouds. In all the wild expanse not a thing of life visible; not a sail, or a mast to break the line of the horizon, unsteady in the swelling of the sea. Only at our left hand, a few hundred yards away, the *Dunottar Castle*, riding safely upon the storm, looking as collected and indifferent as if it had been the fairest day that ever dawned; the embodiment of a Mendelssohn Symphony: "Calm weather and prosperous voyage."

And here we sat on the pier within sight of that little land of Goshen, to which we could not attain.

THE OLD MAID'S COUNSEL TO THE YOUNG MAN.

Oh, youth! beware of female charms,
  False, fickle, fleeting, they;
Bright smiles and glances soft beguile,
Sweet words may last but for awhile,
  And then dissolve away.

Question thyself in earnest mood
  When Cupid wounds thy heart—
Can "classic brow," or "liquid eye,"
Cook apple-fritters, onions fry,
  Make jam and gooseberry tart?

Can "chestnut hair," nose "aquiline,"
  Potatoes peel and boil?
Can "swanlike neck," and form "divine,"
Milk cows, feed pigs, make orange wine,
  And live a life of toil?

Can "lily fingers," "pearly teeth,"
  Darn hose and lay the cloth?
Can "rose-bud lips," or "jetty fringe,"
Pluck fowls, shell peas, and bacon singe,
  Make cheese, soup, sauces, broth?

If Hymen's torch must kindled be,
  Beware of Beauty's bloom;
Grace, wit, and fascination's ray,
Like fading lights at close of day,
  Foretell approaching gloom.

George Herbert Best.

A MODERN GENIE.

By Beriah Gwynfe.

I.

THE GENIE.

"Danhasch left Maimoune, and flew towards China, whence he soon returned with incredible speed, bringing the fair princess along with him asleep. Maimoune received him, and introduced him into the chamber of Prince Camaralzaman."

THE reader's eyes glowed in sympathy with the daring deed, and his heart beat in emulation of the dread spirit's powers. Indeed, at some previous stage in the cycle of existence, Dick Somerton might possibly have been himself a genie—good or evil as the case might be—delighting in playing such tricks upon harmless and unsuspecting mortals as Danhasch had upon Badoura.

Sitting in the well-furnished library of Somerton Grange, sunk in his day-dream, he offered fair game to the beautiful girl who, with finger on lip, advanced on tiptoe behind him, unperceived, and suddenly clasped her hands over his eyes.

Startled from his musings, the lad jumped from his chair, only to be greeted by a silvery laugh, half merriment, half derision.

"And so you have nerves too, Master Dick!" quoth she banteringly.

"I say, Kate," said he shamefacedly, "stop that! Do you know I was thinking of you when you came in."

"I am deeply flattered, I am sure," sinking gracefully into a deep arm-chair beside his. "I hope, however, I am not quite so hideous as that."

"Hideous?"

"Yes, so hideous that even the thought of me frightens you."

"No, but, Kate, we'll cry quits. You owed me one, and you've repaid it. If I hadn't been reading this blessed thing about genii and all that, I shouldn't have been such a milksop as to be startled by——"

"Do the thing handsomely, Dick, while you are about it," smiled she, "and say 'by a fairy.'"

"That's what I *will* say," was the gallant response. "There never was a more beautiful fairy than you, Cousin Kate."

"That will do, Dick, very nicely indeed. You are improving rapidly. I have hopes of you yet. What have you been reading?"

"'Arabian Nights.' I was at the story of Prince Camaralzaman and the Princess Badoura, just where the genie Danhasch has brought the princess to Camaralzaman's room."

"A beautiful story truly, but hardly suited to your tender years, Dick. I'll ask my uncle to lock the book out of your reach."

"You dare! But, Kate," and he threw himself on the rug at her feet, resting his elbows on her knees. "Seriously, now, I was thinking of you as Princess Badoura, who, you know, braved her father's anger by refusing to marry, and was shut up in confinement with a lot of old women to wait upon her until she came to her right mind once more."

She gave an involuntary start, then looked inquiringly into his eyes as though to read how much lay behind his words.

Truth to tell, her case resembled that of the Princess of China more closely than her hair-brained boy-cousin seemed to imagine. Kate Villiers was really and truly at the time practically a prisoner at Somerton Grange.

Flying in the face of providence and of parental authority, she had absolutely refused to take upon her the matrimonial yoke; and that, as I have yet to explain, under conditions which most girls would have deemed no hardship. Wealth had been offered her with a husband of her own choice; wealth and rank with a husband of her father's choice. She had no objection to wealth, and no aversion to rank; but when she could only enjoy either burdened with a husband, she refused both, declining to claim the one at the cost of being saddled with the encumbrance of the other. She would marry no husband of her father's choice; she had apparently no choice of her own—or if she had, no one knew of it. In any case this much may be said. Her actions and words in reply to her father's entreaties, appeals, and threats, might have been regarded as a free paraphrase of Princess Badoura's words to the King of China:

> "Sir, you have an inclination to see me married, and to think to oblige me by it, but . . . I have no inclination to be commanded."

And she absolutely refused to put herself under the control of a husband even at the command of a father!

How much of the story Dick Somerton really knew, it would be difficult to say. But the truth may as well be told: Kate Villiers, presumably as a punishment for her sins, had been banished to the comparative solitude of Somerton Grange.

"Yes," proceeded Dick, looking admiringly into his cousin's face, "and I was just thinking as you came in, what a jolly thing it would be if I possessed the power of the genie Danhasch to convey the Prince Camaralzaman to your presence, and make you fall in love with him."

"That is very good of you, I am sure," she replied, with a somewhat half-hearted attempt at a laugh. "I suppose you have gone even further, and fixed upon your prince?"

"Yours rather," said the lad. "And I don't mind telling you that I have."

'And of course, like every other prince, he is brave?"

"He has proved himself so."

"And handsome?"

"As Adonis."

"And rich?"

"No. He is almost as poor as a church mouse."

"Ah! There you spoil the story!"

"Not at all, Kate! It isn't his fault that he has met reverses, and had to sell out."

"To sell out?"

"Yes, out of the army. He has come a cropper—lost a pot of money—some rotten investment or other, and has sold out of the army to pay his debts. He was Burnaby's chum, you know, in the relief of Khartoum, and got the V.C., you know, and——"

"But how can I know unless you tell me his name?"

"Oh! I thought you knew! In any case you ought to know there is only one man fit to play Prince Camaralzaman to your Princess Badoura."

"That is uncomplimentary, Dick, and I must say your story is getting tiresome. You had better let your prince preserve his incognito," and with a pretence at a yawn she rose and made to leave the room.

"All right, Kate! I'll pay you for that, see if I don't! But the prince will be here to-night."

She was startled out of her equanimity.

"Here! Is he coming here?"

"I thought you didn't know who it was!" laughed the boy; then as his cousin tossed her head and turned her back once more, he said to himself:

"The thing is worth trying; and if nothing comes of it, it will put Kate and the Captain in a queer hole. I should like to see them to-morrow."

And chuckling to himself, the lad left the room.

II.

THE PRINCESS BADOURA.

KATE VILLIERS had been at Somerton Grange just three days at the time our story opens. She had been sent, or rather brought, there in deep disgrace.

"Jane, my dear," Mrs. Villiers had said to her sister in the seclusion of her own boudoir when Mrs. Somerton had paid a hurried visit to town in response to a frantic and not altogether intelligible letter of appeal for help: "Jane, my dear, you cannot imagine the trouble that girl has given us."

"Well, I'm sure, Lucy, I can't understand it. I had always

regarded Kate as a girl any mother might be proud of. I know she created a great sensation when she came out, and that she could practically have made the best match of the season."

"Just so, and that makes it all the harder now to bear! the ungrateful, undutiful girl that she is! It is almost enough to make one wish her aunt had never left her such a lot of money!"

"I see!" said Mrs. Somerton. "You wish to send her to the Grange to be [out of the way of some undesirable *parti* who wants her money."

"No! It is just the reverse," replied Mrs. Villiers wiping her eyes. "Let me tell you the whole story. You know Leonard's sister, who died a year ago, left a large fortune."

"Yes, and that Kate was the fortunate legatee."

"Yes. She gets a hundred thousand under certain conditions, and Leonard gets ten thousand if Kate's conditions are fulfilled."

"I am ignorant of the particulars. You know I have been abroad for the greater part of the year."

"Quite so. Well, let me explain. Her aunt, while yet in her teens, was crossed in love. There was a sort of unauthorised engagement with a poor subaltern, and her father, very properly I think, forbade the marriage. The lover went on foreign service, and shortly died. Miss Villiers, who was Leonard's sister, as you know, never married. Kate had always been a favourite with her, and in her desire to save her niece from the fate which had befallen herself, old Miss Villiers made the most outrageous disposition of her property it is possible to imagine. You see, it was her father's opposition to her marriage which had made her own life so lonely and loveless. She wished to guard Kate against this by placing a premium, as it were, on her finding a husband."

"Oh, that is a common way, you know; to make the succession to a legacy dependent upon marrying a certain person. Kate, I suppose, does not care for the person her aunt had selected?"

"No, no, that is not it! She is left absolutely unfettered in her choice. If she marries before she is twenty-one, or within twelve months of her aunt's death, she gets a hundred thousand, and Leonard gets ten thousand. But, if she does not marry within that time, Kate gets nothing and her father gets nothing."

"And Kate?"

"Exactly! Kate won't marry; and all the money, with the exception of a few paltry hundreds, goes to some charities. It is enough to drive one mad! Why, ten thousand would be the making of us, without mentioning Kate's hundred thousand!"

"The stupid girl!"

"And the offers that girl has rejected! You'd hardly believe! There was Sir Arthur Wilson, who owns half the county almost—she absolutely laughed in his face when he proposed three months ago.'

"But, Lucy, Sir Arthur is old enough to be her father!"

"And therefore all the better fitted to keep her in order! Then only yesterday she insulted, openly insulted, Lord Ravensbeak, who proposed to her father for her hand. She called him a spendthrift, a gambler, and to his face raked up that nasty story about the—you know."

"Yes, I *do* know. And I must say, Lucy, that if you have been urging such men as these on Kate, it is not to be wondered at that she should have refused them."

"Jane! And you would aid and abet my daughter in open defiance of her parents' authority!"

"Certainly I would if you attempt to exercise that authority so unwisely."

Mrs. Villiers' reply was a succession of sobs which threatened to border on a hysterical display, had not her stronger-minded sister literally as well as metaphorically shaken her with more common sense than gentleness.

"Come, Lucy. It is nc use you going on like this. The situation must be faced. Which would you prefer—a title or the fortune for Kate?"

"What a question! a title is all very well, but she can't live on that."

"Quite so, and you can't pay off the mortgage on the Court with another man's title. That being so, it is better that Kate should marry anybody who pleases her, than that she should remain single. Is there no previous attachment?"

"I know of none."

"And what time has she left? She was twenty-one, I think, last summer?"

"Yes, in July."

"And when did her aunt die?"

"In October of last year."

"And it is now September!"

"Yes. Unless she is married by the twenty-first of next month everything will be lost!"

Were it permitted ladies to whistle, Mrs. Somerton would undoubtedly have relieved her feelings in that manner. Failing this she had recourse to her smelling-bottle, making meanwhile a rapid mental calculation.

"We have, therefore, just three weeks and four days left in which to carry the thing through."

Then followed a deep and earnest conversation between the sisters. Mrs. Somerton, after mastering the situation, pointed out to her sister that, possibly, Kate, having in the great world of society too wide a field to select from, had at one and the same time found the task more difficult and the prospect less attractive than if her choice had been strictly limited.

'Now, Lucy, you must run no further risks. We must have no

more urging the girl to accept men against whom her physical or her moral nature revolts. The case is really too critical a one. We must get her to marry, not the person whom we would wish, but the man who is likely to be least objectionable to her. I will take Kate back with me to-morrow. You give me a perfectly free hand to deal with her as I like, and I will undertake to say that in three weeks she will be ready to marry. Young Mr. Aspinwell was I know, deeply struck by Kate's beauty at the last ball. If no great catch, he would be regarded by many as a desirable *parti*—not over rich, but still sufficiently so to make the match altogether an appropriate one. The Colonel shall write, inviting him to stay with us for a week or so. The shooting-party have all gone. There will be no one at the Grange except Kate and he. And after the rush of London life, she will be only too glad of any company to relieve the solitude of the country. You take my word for it, Kate will be Mrs. Aspinwell in time to claim her aunt's legacy."

Mrs. Somerton spoke confidently—but as frequently happens counted without her host.

Thus was Kate Villiers, for her sins, banished to the Grange, where she saw no one except her uncle, Colonel Somerton, her aunt, and her Cousin Dick.

Mrs. Somerton, like a sensible woman, at once took her husband into her confidence, and found that one minor detail of her little plot would have to be modified. The Colonel had already invited a former messmate of his—Captain Bassett by name—to spend a few days at the Grange, and he was due on the 29th.

"But that need not interfere with your plans, my dear," said he. "Bassett was never much of a lady's man, and is less likely to be so now than ever. You know he was hard hit over that South American business. A rascally solicitor had invested all Bassett's money there, and now——" The blank in the sentence was more expressive than words.

"He has sold out, has he not?"

"Yes. He was too honourable to retain anything which might be turned into money for his creditors' benefit. He has, perhaps, a couple of hundred at his bankers, and is going out to South Africa in a couple of months. He'll make his mark, too. They will be only too glad to find work for the hero of the march on Khartoum."

"Well, it won't much matter," commented Mrs. Somerton, "I can have the green room put ready for him, and I have already instructed Sarah to prepare the west blue room for Mr. Aspinwell."

Meanwhile, ignorant, or seemingly so, of the conspiring going on among the higher powers, Kate Villiers found the quiet of the Grange restful, and the humours of Dick Somerton a welcome relief after the harassing attentions of her too eager suitors.

III.

PRINCE CAMARALZAMAN.

DICK SOMERTON had, with all a boy's admiration for whatever is brave or "plucky," long since placed Captain Bassett near the highest pinnacle of British heroes—a position for which indeed he was, in the estimation of many, not altogether unfitted by the deeds with which the country had resounded during the historical march on Khartoum; a march in which he had showed at once such dash and coolness.

Dick took good care to be ready in the hall when the Captain arrived—the Colonel having done his old messmate the honour of meeting him at the station eight miles distant, and driving him over himself. The lad was thus enabled to "do the honours," as he called it; in other words to show the Captain his room.

"The green room, Dick!" called out his father, as Dick bounded up the stairs.

"All right, dad," came the ready response.

"Here we are, Captain," he said, pushing open the door of a spacious room of somewhat unusual construction. Had the Captain been very observant he would have noticed that the room was made up in blue and not in green, as one would have supposed from the Colonel's words. Its peculiarity, however, consisted in that, one portion—that to the right of the door, and facing the large bay window—was partitioned off from the body of the room, forming in fact a sort of curtained alcove, containing a large old-fashioned bedstead, with a space of possibly three feet between the bed and the wall on the one hand and the curtain separating the alcove from the room on the other. To make it clear, the partition, which reached from the ground to the ceiling, was L-shaped, the long leg running from behind the door in the direction of the window; the space from the end of the shorter leg to the wall against which the head of the bed was placed being bridged by a massive brass rod, from which hung heavy blue curtains looped up at the sides. There was thus really a bedroom within a bedroom as it were. The space between the head of the bed and the curtain was occupied by a large wardrobe, the lower portion of which was open, the upper part, three-fourths of the whole, being enclosed by panelled doors.

Towards this wardrobe Dick made his way, placing the portmanteau in the lower portion, and throwing open the upper doors.

"Just a hint, Captain," said he; "the mater is awfully strict about a place for everything and everything in its place, and all that. You won't take it amiss if I ask you to keep your portmanteau just here, out of sight, you know; and the clothes you don't wear hung up in the wardrobe?"

"Thanks, Dick; I'll see to it."

"Comfortable quarters, aren't they?"

"Rather! A lot better than we had in the Soudan!"

"You'll let me come in for half an hour to-night to have some yarns, won't you?"

"What a voracious appetite for yarns you must have, to be sure! But I'll try to satisfy you."

"Thanks, awfully. I'll leave you now to your own devices. You'll hear the dinner-bell in half an hour. You can find your way down, I suppose? Or shall I call for you?"

"No, Dick. I think I'll manage, thanks."

Half an hour later Captain Bassett, entering the drawing-room, was surprised to see a graceful figure in white standing with her back to the door in lively conversation with the Colonel.

Mrs. Somerton advanced to meet him with outstretched hand.

"Welcome to the Grange, Captain Bassett. I hope you had a pleasant journey down?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Somerton, yes."

"Bassett, let me introduce you to my niece, Miss Villiers," said the Colonel.

Kate turned, and gave her uncle's guest a somewhat frigid bow.

"It is a needless trouble, uncle. I have had the honour of meeting Captain Bassett before, I think."

"Yes—that is, no—no—I mean yes, I have had," and the Captain stumbled hopelessly, flushing to the roots of his hair, to Dick's no small amusement.

"That is satisfactory if not altogether explicit," smiled the Colonel. "Will you give Mrs. Somerton your arm, Bassett," and so they stormed the dining-room.

It must be admitted that the newly-arrived guest contributed but little to the conversation at the dinner-table. He sat almost silent, not to say taciturn, giving monosyllabic replies to his hostess on the one hand, and not altogether relevant answers to Dick's remarks on the other.

Mrs. Somerton had her suspicion aroused by this behaviour, but they were lulled, if not quite disarmed, by the knowledge that the Captain was a confirmed bachelor, impervious to feminine charms, and by the fact that her niece was that evening exceptionally brilliant, and all but oblivious of the Captain's presence opposite her.

The gentlemen did not sit long over their wine, following the ladies in a very short time. Had Miss Villiers set herself out specially to please and enchant, she could hardly have figured to better advantage. Each in turn—except alone Captain Bassett—came under her charm of voice and manner; him she accorded just that amount of courteous notice good breeding demanded—but very little more. Once, indeed, she asked him if he sang, and the question was put in a manner more than courteous. Mrs. Somerton could not help thinking that her guest, if he desired to make himself agreeable to her niece, would not only readily respond to the invitation, but that he

would make it an excuse for asking for a duet. But he did no such thing. Politely, but coldly, almost curtly, he begged to be excused; and the excuse was as coldly accepted. This was the only occasion during the whole evening that Kate directly addressed him.

Hardly had the Captain closed his bedroom door that night than Dick the irrepressible entered.

"I do so like your yarns, you know," said the boy; "and you promised I should see you here for half an hour to-night."

"I'm not in a good mood for yarning to-night, Dick. Suppose you take an innings now, and I'll see what I can do to-morrow?"

"Very well. That's a bargain. I suppose you've read the 'Arabian Nights?'"

The Captain nodded.

"Well, I've been thinking, you know, what a jolly thing it would be if some of those genii were still left, and one had the power of ordering them to do just what one liked."

"What of the Mahatmas?" asked the Captain smiling.

"I don't know about them. But I guess they're not up to much. Now, if I could command a real first-class genie, do you know what I would ask him to do?"

"Procure you Aladdin's lamp, I suppose."

"No. I would get him to reproduce for me the story of Prince Camaralzaman and the Princess Badoura, and take two of my personal friends for the characters."

"And how goes the story? I forget."

"Oh, you know the prince was a confirmed woman-hater—regarded the greatest beauties with as much indifference, and treated them with as little courtesy, as you did my cousin to-night."

Captain Bassett started, bit his moustache, and flushed painfully under the lad's keen gaze.

"The prince refused to think of marriage. The princess was in the very same boat, and would have nothing to do with any who sought her hand. But one night the genie Danhasch brought these two together without their knowing it, and each beheld the other, and, unknown, learned each other's thoughts. Then while they still slept the genie again separated them. When they awoke in the morning in their separate rooms they could not believe their eyes. Each had learned as it were that they loved, and were loved, and neither could be happy again unless they were married. The prince sought and at last found the princess, and married her offhand."

"A very interesting story, truly," said the Captain suppressing a yawn. "But how do you propose applying it to-day?"

"Well, you are my Prince Camaralzaman, of course."

"Much obliged for the honour, I'm sure. And have you found the princess?"

"I can tell you she is now in actual existence, and I could, if I liked, do with her what Danhasch did with Badoura."

"And what was that?"

"Bring her, unknown to you, and unknown to her, into your room. And when you woke in the morning you would be surrounded by the signs and proofs of her presence, and unable to believe your eyes."

"Dick, my dear boy, you must be a fool, or think I am one. Go to bed."

"Then, good-night, and pleasant dreams; but don't forget me in the morning!" and Dick glided out.

No sooner was the lad gone than Captain Bassett got up, pacing the room like a caged beast.

"I never thought I should have met her here," said he. "Had I known, I would have shirked the trial, even at the cost of displeasing the Colonel. 'Twas hard to meet on this new footing—harder than had we met as strangers, after what has been. Heaven knows, I have been hard tried during the past twelve months, but nothing has been harder than to give up all hope of winning Kate. 'Twas my cursed luck to lose my own fortune at the very moment she came into hers. My loss created the gulf to separate us: her gain widened it, and it is, and must be, impassable."

Then going to his portmanteau, he drew out a small packet, which he opened, disclosing a miniature case, containing on one side the photograph of a girl who might have sat for Princess Badoura's portrait as drawn by Danhasch himself—in other words, of Kate Villiers. Opposite it was one single curl of silky hair, neatly mounted on a card. Underneath photograph and curl were a few words written in a small but beautifully clear hand.

Placing the case before him on the table, where the light of the lamp fell full upon it, he gazed long and lovingly upon his treasures —for such beyond a doubt they were. Almost unconsciously he read aloud the words written by his own hand on the cards:

"*Had fortune proved less harsh to me, or less kind to her, I would have ventured. Now all I dare claim are these—and memory.*

"J. B. Cairo, August 188–."

"Yes," he mused, "I shall have these—and memory; though she knows nothing of the first, and shall know nothing of the last if I can help it."

Then caressing the brown curl, and impressing a passionate kiss on the sweet face smiling up into his, he proceeded to divest himself of his clothes, and sought his bed, where in his dreams he fancied he saw Kate Villiers borne off by the Mahdi's followers, while he made frantic but futile efforts to reach her side.

IV.

THE GENIE INTERVENES.

When Captain Bassett awoke the next morning and proceeded leisurely to dress himself, he met with a surprise. Acting on Dick's instructions he had, after taking out his evening dress, replaced his portmanteau in the wardrobe. On proceeding to search for it, he found the spot where he thought the wardrobe should have been occupied by a couple of chairs, on one of which was placed his bed-room candlestick. Staring around him in astonishment he perceived the wardrobe on the other side of the bed, with his portmanteau and its contents as he had left them.

"What a fool I am to be sure!" he said. "I could have sworn the wardrobe stood between my bed and the room, while here it is actually between the bed and the wall!" He pondered a moment, and then laughed to himself. "Of course it's all right. I remember distinctly the wardrobe was on my right, and my candle on my left as I lay in bed, and here they are in that very position. And yet I could have taken my oath, too, that the wardrobe was between me and the window when I went to bed, while now it is the bed which is on the outside. And now let me obey Dick's injunction and get my house in order. My evening dress, which I left on the back of a chair, must come into the wardrobe."

Proceeding to pass out of the alcove containing the bed, into the larger room, he experienced a recurrence of the sensation. He was struck with some such sense of strangeness as a man might be expected to feel in a room familiar to him by description but which he had never before seen. So strongly was this impressed on him that he paused as it were on the threshold.

"If I were in Africa," he mused, "I should think I was going to get a bad attack of fever. I suppose it's the effect of that hairbrained lad's talk of genii and all that rot. The curtains are all right as I left them; there's the window, and the dressing-table, and the table with the lamp all as they should be; and here is the chair where I placed my clothes," passing out into the fuller light of the open room, only to utter an exclamation of profound astonishment.

The chair was there,—but not as he had left it. Instead of his own clothes, there glittered the sheen of a lady's dress, falling in soft white folds over the back of the chair.

"What madcap prank has that boy been playing?" he cried, half angry, half amused. Being a man of action, he strode to the window, and drew up the blinds, throwing a flood of light into the room.

Everything was the same—and yet everything was different. The dressing-table was in its old place, but instead of his shaving-case which he was certain he had left there the previous night, it was littered with all a lady's toilet paraphernalia of hairpins, scent-bottles,

hand-glasses, and other fittings. There also lay the brooch he had seen Miss Villiers wear the previous evening; yes, and there, too, lying on its velvet cushion the pearl necklace which had graced what Dick had described as her alabaster neck.

So it was with the rest of the furniture in the room. Every article was placed precisely as he remembered it the previous evening, but all around were the unmistakable tokens that the occupant of the room was a lady accustomed to luxury, and not a soldier able to dispense with all but the barest necessities of civilisation.

"The little imp must have got in last night while I slept," said the Captain, smiling uncomfortably to himself.

But the smile gave place to a frown as a fresh thought rushed to his brain, and he strode to the table on which he had left his treasures—the photograph and lock of hair. The table was there, the lamp was there, precisely as he had left them—but the portrait and its companion relic had disappeared.

Resting on the very spot they had occupied was a lady's watch marking the time—8.30.

Something like an oath escaped his lips.

"This is carrying the joke too far. Does the young fool think I'm going to be made the butt of his stupid practical jokes? By heaven, were it not that he is his father's son, I would horsewhip him, or duck him in the horse-trough. To think that he should now be making fun of my sentimental folly about his cousin."

Any ordinary joke he might have overlooked: but that his heart's inmost and secret thoughts, as represented in the miniature and its accompanying memorandum, should be bared to this madcap boy's eyes, and possibly made the subject of ridicule, this was indeed unbearable.

There being nothing better to do, he bottled his indignation for the time, and proceeded to complete the operation of dressing, which had been suspended by his first strange discovery. But he had not got on his coat when a new thought rushed into his mind.

It came upon him like a revelation.

He had never been in that room before.

Strong man, and brave as he was, a cold moisture broke over his forehead. He had all along attributed the changes in the contents of the outer apartment to the nimble-fingered, light-footed Dick, who had of course got into the room and effected the changes while the Captain slept.

But now he saw it was not so. He was in a different room altogether from that in which Dick had left him the previous evening. Of that there was no longer room for doubt.

True, the fittings and the furniture, down to the smallest detail, were the same. But whereas the alcove containing the bed had been the previous night to the right of the door, it was now to the left. Obversely the fireplace, which had been to his left the previous night

as he entered the room, was now to his right. Then too, the fireplace, which was empty when he went to bed, now contained the burnt embers of a fire which must have been burning when he went to bed, for they were still warm.

Stepping to the alcove he again noted the changes there. The bed was the same, the chairs, hangings, wardrobe—all were the same.

But he was now certain the wardrobe had been removed to the opposite side of the bed from that where it stood ten hours ago.

But, stay! was it the wardrobe which had been moved, or was it the bed?

He now remembered that after putting out the light he had lain on his right side gazing at the faint glimmer of the moon through the window.

But were he to lie on his right side on the same bed, and undoubtedly in the same alcove, now, he would face, not the open room and the window beyond, but the wall within three feet or so of the bedside!

Fortunately for Captain Bassett he was neither nervous nor superstitious. He knew there could have been no supernatural agency at work. All the changes could, of course, have been effected only by physical means.

"I must have been drugged or chloroformed, or something, and carried to some other room!" he said. "Though how that imp could have got men to help him play such a trick—as he must have done—passes my comprehension!"

But even this explanation would not bear investigation. For, not only must he himself have been removed, but also the bed on which he lay, and the alcove on which the bed was placed; for beyond the possibility of doubt the bed and the alcove were the very same that they had been the previous night; while equally beyond a doubt the larger room was not the same.

How to explain this seeming paradox was beyond his powers, but that it was so must now be placed beyond question.

Swallowing his anger and chagrin as best he could, he now completed his toilet, and proceeded to the breakfast-room, where he found the others already assembled. Was it fancy, or did he really perceive a mantling blush on Miss Villiers' face as he entered? Dick's attempt to imitate the inscrutable sphinx was a decided failure, for he with difficulty smothered a laugh as he gazed upon the storm-cloud on the Captain's brow.

The morning was spent on the stubble; Captain Bassett, generally accounted a good shot, scoring misses of which the veriest tyro would have been ashamed. The Colonel and Dick, however, made up for their guest's failures, and the party returned to lunch with a fair bag.

"I am going to drive over to Somerton Road to meet Mr. Aspinwell, who is going to spend a few days with us," remarked the Colonel; "will you accompany me, Bassett?"

"No, dad!" interposed Dick; "Captain Bassett has promised me an hour after lunch."

Before the surprised guest could contradict the mendacious lad, the Colonel rose, saying:

"Then, in that case, I'd better be off," and left the room.

V.

WHAT CAME OF IT.

FIVE minutes later Captain Bassett stood in the library glaring down upon his host's son.

"Now, sir! what have you to say?" he demanded.

"What have I to say?" echoed Dick, in a tone of well-assumed innocence.

"I want no parleying with you, lad," came the stern response. "I want a full and complete explanation. And I warn you if that explanation be not satisfactory, I may be forced, unwillingly perhaps, but none the less certainly, to adopt strong measures to mark my sense of the manner you have been pleased to treat your father's guest."

Dick, who had been whistling unconcernedly, stopped at this. Lifting his head proudly, and gazing unflinchingly in the Captain's angry eyes, he said:

"Captain Bassett, you will excuse me, but were it not that I have a deeper respect for my father's honour as host than I have even for my father's guest, I should resent the tone you have assumed towards me, and dare you to do what you liked."

As he looked at the spirited lad, the soldier's glance softened. The bold and haughty reply had touched a sympathetic cord in his breast, and he proceeded more coldly:

"I did not come here to bandy threats, but to seek that explanation which is my due."

The smile returned to Dick's face.

"Look here, Captain," he said, "we are not going to quarrel. You may ride your high horse and welcome, and I'll not kick. You think you've been badly treated, and on the face of it, it may look so. But you may change your mind. Now what is it you want to know?"

"You got into my room last night?"

"Before you went to bed; not after."

"Where are the things I left on my table last night?"

"I have neither touched nor set eyes upon them."

"You moved my bed?"

"I give you my word of honour I didn't touch your bed after I left you."

"But I got up this morning in a different room from that in which I went to sleep last night."

"And yet, I repeat, neither I nor anyone else touched your bed.

But I don't want to beat about the bush. You remember my challenge last night?"

Captain Bassett bit his moustache, but made no reply. The lad continued:

"I said I would, unknown to her and unknown to you, bring my Princess Badoura into your room, and when you woke in the morning you would be surrounded by the signs and proofs of her presence, and yet be unable to believe your eyes. Now I ask you, have I, or have I not, fulfilled that promise?"

"Do you mean to say, Dick, that the room I occupied this morning was your cousin's room?"

"Exactly."

"The room she occupied last night?"

"Precisely!"

"Then all I have to say is that you deserve the veriest horse-whipping man or boy ever had!"

Dick laughed in his face.

"Now, now, don't you go off at a tangent again without knowing where you are. When all's said and done, there's no harm. I said that unknown to her as well as to you, I would bring this about—and so I have. You got up in her room—she got up in yours."

"Good heavens! Do you mean to say that—that——"

"That when Kate got up this morning she found your shaving-case where her jewel-box should have been, and your dress-coat where her last evening's dress was placed? That is exactly the state of things."

The Captain struck his clenched hand against his forehead.

"Then she must have seen—must have seen——"

"Seen you? Oh dear me, no! No more than you saw her. You were as far apart as when I left you."

"Tush! Seen what I had left on the table."

"If in the outer room, yes. She occupied her own alcove, but got your room. You occupied your alcove and got her room. That's all."

It was a relief to learn that Dick, at all events, knew nothing of the miniature. But—and the thought to a man of Captain Bassett's sensitive nature was little short of madness—Miss Villiers, from whom he would have at any cost hidden his thoughts, now knew his secret. More than this, the photograph and lock of hair which he treasured—she would think he had no right to them; she had never given them to him; she never knew he had them.

"Oh, Dick! Dick!" he groaned, "if you knew what your folly is like to cost me!"

"More than you think, I'm afraid. Why don't you ask Kate to marry you? If you want her, you've got to ask her to-day; you've got to ask her before the governor comes back bringing with him the man they want her to marry."

"Is that true, Dick?"

"On my word. I'm neither blind nor deaf. I heard the whole conspiracy. Her father tried to get her to marry Lord Ravensbeak, but she kicked over the traces."

"Good heavens! Ravensbeak! Gambler, rogue——"

"Yes, a bad lot altogether, I'm afraid. But, you see, the case is this. Unless Kate marries within three weeks she'll lose the hundred thousand her aunt left her. Her father and mother are wild to see her safe, and mad that she will persist in refusing every offer."

"She has refused?"

"A host of the pick of the season. Aspinwell is the last hope, and she has been sent here to meet him, though she doesn't know that. I know she doesn't care for him, though he's not a bad sort. If you're half the man I take you to be you will rush to rescue the unprotected damsel, and all that, you know."

"But look here, Dick, don't you think——"

"I think you're funking. But I'll have no parleying with you. What I've said I'll stick to. You've got to face the guns within the hour. And by jove! There's Kate coming! I'll be off. Just one word. Faint heart—you know."

And the lad dashed away through the door as his cousin entered through the open window.

* * * * *

There was a striking difference between the appearance of these two young people as they stood facing each other.

The timid girl was cool, self-possessed, and, to one who knew her ways, in a distinctly aggressive humour.

The man of the world, the experienced soldier tried and never found wanting when it would have been no dishonour to have flinched, stood evidently ill at ease, with flushed face and deprecating look as though he were a culprit caught red-handed.

Miss Villiers was the first to speak, and her words were hardly calculated to restore his equanimity.

"Captain Bassett," said she, in that musical tone whose echoes had been wont to linger long in his ears, but which, nevertheless, had now a hard unsympathetic ring about them: "Captain Bassett, I have come to offer and to request an explanation and an apology."

He bowed, but could find no words to answer.

"I have to apologise for the inconvenience and trouble my cousin's practical joke must have caused you. You will, I am sure, acquit his parents and myself from any participation in or the slightest knowledge of the trick until it was done."

"Permit me, Miss Villiers!"

"A moment, please, and I shall be glad to have your explanation. I would wish to add that neither Colonel Somerton nor my aunt is even yet aware that the trick has been played. And though he little

deserves it, I would bespeak your consideration for my cousin so far as not to mention this latest of his escapades."

"I have just been having it out with Dick, and had no intention of making the slightest further reference to the matter."

"Very good. Did he tell you how the thing was done?"

"No. I was simply aware that I had in some inexplicable fashion changed my room without changing my bed."

A faint suspicion of colour mantled her pale cheek.

"Briefly, this is the explanation. Colonel Somerton's father had a strong bent for mechanics, and the idea, suggested possibly by a desire to play a practical joke on some companion, seems to have presented itself that he might provide a pair of interchangeable bedrooms. The alcoves, in which the beds are placed, stand on a strong framework turning on a central pivot, in such a manner that by the simple operation of a lever, certain machinery is put in motion, and the whole structure of the alcoves makes a half turn, thus placing the western alcove in connection with the eastern bedroom, and *vice versâ*. A further manipulation of the lever will result in another half turn, placing the bedrooms in all respects as they were. When you get back to your bedroom you will find things as they were last night. My cousin knows this trick, and has given me before a practical illustration, during daylight, of how the thing works. But it never entered my head for a moment that he would ever venture to play the trick upon any of his father's guests. He went so far as to change the bedroom intended for you without his mother's knowledge. Had you slept where his mother had arranged, and where she thinks you were, the trick would have been impossible. On Colonel Somerton's behalf, and that of my aunt, I now desire to tender you an apology."

"No such apology was needed, I can assure you. I of course felt angry with Dick, not so much that I had been made the butt of his humour, but that you should—I mean that I—that is to say——"

"You may as well be candid, Captain Bassett," she said coldly, "and say that I should have been made an unwilling witness to an act on your part which, unless you can satisfactorily explain, I must characterise as dishonourable."

Captain Bassett flushed angrily. "Miss Villiers," he said, and the calmness and evenness of his tones were in striking contrast to his late incoherence: "I would respectfully remind you that you are abusing the privilege of a woman when you call my honour in question."

"How do you account"— she began hotly, passionately.

He raised his hand. "Excuse me," he said, "I will not pretend to misapprehend your meaning. You ask for an explanation of how your photograph, and that lock of your hair came into my possession?"

"That first," she said, biting her lips.

"That alone—and no more, Miss Villiers," he said coldly. "May I trouble you to carry your thoughts back to a twelvemonth since, when you, in company with other ladies, acted the part of good Samaritans to the Soudan wounded in Cairo—among whom I was proud to rank myself?"

She bowed.

"You will doubtless recollect that among those to whom you so tenderly ministered was a young ensign of my company—a mere boy."

"Whose life you so gallantly saved," she whispered, the words trembling on her lips, as the tears trembled in her eyes from which the fire was now quenched.

"He, the boy, Frank Coldford, was good enough to think so; in any case the bond between us was an uncommon one. You doubtless also remember the circumstances under which you gave him the —the articles to which you have referred?"

"He told me," and there was a break in the sweet voice, "that his case was hopeless, and he begged of me to let him have them—that they would—oh, I cannot speak of it!"

"I regret to have caused you pain. His words were that he wanted to have these of yours with him when he died."

An audible sob.

"The night he died I sat watching by his side. I will not trouble you with details. Suffice it to say that he had guessed more than I cared he should, more perhaps than I knew myself. He gave me the photo and the lock of hair, and begged me to keep them for his sake, and yours."

The proud head was bent low.

"That dying request of my friend I have religiously observed. I have never from that day until this morning been separated from the keepsakes. And, Miss Villiers, with all due consideration for the feelings which must possess you in knowing these articles are in the hands of a stranger, of one who has undoubtedly no claim upon you, I must beg of you not to put an obstacle in the way of fulfilling my promise to my friend."

For answer she drew from her pocket the case containing the miniature and the lock of hair, and handed them to him without a word.

"I thank you," he said coldly. "You may rely upon it that none but yourself shall ever know I have these, while I live. I have explained how they came into my possession, and have, I trust, made good my right to them. Having done so, I hardly think any apology for retaining them is necessary."

She now looked up, her tear-dimmed eyes glancing shyly towards him.

"You have not explained all," she said.

"All you have a right to have explained," he answered. "May I be allowed to retire?"

She bent her head. He turned to leave her. A whisper caught his ear.

"Won't you explain?" she asked when he turned back.

His face had grown grey.

"I have nothing further to explain," he said; but notwithstanding his efforts he felt his calmness deserting him.

"Captain Bassett," she said, "you are ungenerous in compelling me to say more. Frank Coldford gave me also a parting gift."

He started, and gazed eagerly, anxiously, at her as, with downcast face and trembling fingers, she drew a second packet forth, and held it towards him.

It was his own miniature which he had given Frank Coldford a day or two before he died. For a moment the pallor on his face deepened, then came a rush of blood to his head. He looked at her. She had turned her face away, but the beautiful graceful neck he could see suffused. In a moment everything was forgotten but his deep love.

"Miss Villiers—Kate! May I?" he began brokenly, appealingly, as the girl stood with bent head and averted face before him. What more he would have said need not be told, for the next moment she lay sobbing on his breast, while he poured into her willing ear the pent-up feelings of the past twelve months, and explained how the loss of his own fortune, and the knowledge that she had become a great heiress, had operated to keep him silent.

Sweet and sacred was the interchange of confidences.

* * * * *

But the surprises of the day were not yet over. They were caught unawares by Mrs Somerton—not, I fear, without Dick's cognisance; and Captain Bassett felt then and there called upon to make a second explanation.

"And what, may I ask, do you propose doing, Captain Bassett?" she inquired coldly.

Her tone was not one to encourage a suitor less bashful than Captain Bassett.

"The thing has been so sudden that I really have no definite plan," he replied. "But I think of proceeding to South Africa, and hope in time to be in a position to offer marriage."

"And meanwhile Miss Villiers must sacrifice a hundred thousand pounds for the sake of waiting a dozen years for a wandering husband?"

"I would sacrifice that twice over, aunt," said Kate hotly.

Her aunt ignored this answer.

"I would put it to you, Captain Bassett, whether you are acting honourably in depriving Miss Villiers of this legacy?"

"Miss Villiers must judge for herself in that matter," replied he.

"I will marry no one else," said Kate, roused again.

Mrs. Somerton continued to address Captain Bassett as though her niece had not intervened.

"But allowing for a moment it is right you should permit her to forego this legacy, is it, I ask, right that you should also rob her parents of ten thousand pounds? Unless she marries within three weeks not only does she lose her dowry, but her father is also deprived of the sum I have named."

Captain Bassett was essentially a man of action.

He turned to Kate.

"Will you?" he asked.

"Yes," she whispered.

"Neither the dowry nor the legacy shall be sacrificed," he said. "We'll marry within the time specified."

Mrs. Somerton smiled—and left them.

"It was not what I had intended," she remarked to her husband when he came home, "but it solves the difficulty all the same—and the money is safe in any case."

Her sister and her sister's husband had sufficient common-sense to take the same view of the matter. The only disappointed person was Mr. Aspinwell, who did not enjoy his visit quite so much as he had anticipated.

Dick Somerton seriously entertains the idea of changing his name to Danhasch the Genie.

[NOTE.—The remarkable mechanical device on which the above story is founded, really exists in a family mansion in the North of England. The inventor, a country gentleman of somewhat limited means, did not make quite so happy a use of the mechanism as Dick Somerton seems to have done. A rich maiden aunt with whom he was a great favourite, while on a visit to the house, was made the subject of the experiment so successfully tried on Captain Bassett. Her anger at the trick played upon her was however so great that, refusing to listen to any explanation or apology, she forthwith packed up her belongings and left the place in high dudgeon. Her unhappy nephew, who had been regarded as her heir, found himself at her death six months later, cut off with the proverbial shilling.—B. G.]

THE BRIGHTENING OF THE VANE.

FROM out the pine-clad hills which guard the entrances to the Schwarzwald there issue several rivulets, that in their downward course presently run together and form the swift-flowing River Dreisam. This river pours its waters into a valley which throughout is composed of a series of pictures abounding in romantic beauty and grandeur.

Near the entrance to the valley lies the *Pearl of Breisgau*, with its glorious spire standing out against the sky like a pinnacle of delicate lace-work; and then a little further on, just where the valley begins to close in, you come to a little village nestling among the sweet-scented pine-woods.

A lovely spot, this little village, peaceful and quiet; hardly a sound to be heard at any time, save in the far distance where a water-mill hums and whirls with a delightfully dreamy sound, or when there comes the lowing of cattle from some neighbouring farmstead.

But one day all this was changed, and the usually peaceful little village was thrown into a perfect frenzy of excitement; nearly all the inhabitants had collected together in the market-place; some were standing in little groups talking in subdued voices; women ran hither and thither wringing their hands in despair, while others, almost shouting in their excitement, argued and gesticulated with their neighbours.

"*Ei!*" exclaimed one old woman to another, "this is a bad affair. And," lowering her voice, "no doubt a wrong has been done, and he did it to avoid suspicion."

"Yes, I'm sure you're right" replied the other. "It's shocking, and methinks this is a judgment sent down from above." And on this point most of the villagers seemed to agree.

To give some explanation to all this it will be necessary to go back several weeks, to the day when Max Schmidt and his great friend Otto were working together in one of the picturesque saw-mills on the banks of the Dreisam.

Max was a well-built stolid German, clumsy, and stupid enough to drive one almost to distraction, yet withal one of the kindest-hearted souls that ever trod the fatherland. Now Otto his fellow-worker, though of the same build as Max, was in all other respects entirely different; for he was a handsome young fellow, bright and active and a favourite in the village; he generally wore a broad-brimmed hat topped with a hawk's feather and placed jauntily on the back of his head.

Poor Max was not liked among the villagers, for he had the unhappy knack of blundering over everything he undertook. Whenever he tried to do a good action it was sure to be misinterpreted. For

instance: One day he found a little dog harnessed to a cart four times as large as itself; so out of kindness of heart, and without thinking of the consequences that such an act involved, Max at once stooped down, unfastened the harness and set the little animal at liberty, and the dog to testify its gratitude, insisted on following Max; with the result that a report ran through the village that he had tried to steal the dog, and the voice of popular indignation rose loud against him. Poor Max tried in his dull way to explain matters, but all in vain; the villagers said there could be only one reason for loosing the dog: but here Otto came to the rescue, and in the face of the ridicule of the whole village took Max's part.

As it has been said before, Max and Otto were firm friends. It seemed curious that a friendship should have sprung up between two men of such opposite dispositions, but it happened in this wise: Otto was fond of praise; he loved to hear his friends say, "Bravo, Otto," and nothing rejoiced his heart more than to play bowls in the *biergarten*, and he the centre of an admiring crowd; for there he would stand with his hat well on the back of his head, thereby showing a mass of dark curls in front; one of his dapper little feet placed firmly in front of him and his body thrown back; then the bowl shot out from his hand, hit the goal fairly in the centre, and he was proclaimed winner amid the plaudits of his friends. "Ay, that was a good throw," said Otto, looking proudly round and carefully brushing off a speck of dust from his coat.

And so it was from no feeling of affection, but to gain the praise of the villagers that Otto first resolved to befriend the unfortunate Max; for he said to himself: "The people will say, 'How good of Otto to look after that fellow Max.'" But to his great surprise as time went on, he became quite fond of his so-called friend, and gradually began to understand his quiet retiring nature, and his warm-heartedness, and to see in him far more than he had suspected. And Max in his turn was full of gratitude to Otto, and looked up to him as his protector.

So when Otto's father left him the little saw-mill he made Max his assistant, and these two friends worked together.

As weeks went on a change came over Max, he became brighter, and for him quite talkative, and several times astonished Otto by whistling lively little tunes, a thing he had never been heard to do before.

"Why, Max, what makes you so gay?" asked Otto.

"Such fine weather makes me feel happy," said Max in his slow way.

But Otto was puzzled; he couldn't quite see how the weather could make such a marked difference in his friend; so with a shrug of his big shoulders he gave up guessing, and consoled himself with the thought that the reflection of his own genial disposition must have worked this change; and after a game of bowls at his favourite *biergarten*, he took the earliest opportunity of telling his friends of the good he had done Max.

"Yes," said a man standing near to Otto, "Max ought to be mighty thankful to you, Otto; yet I wouldn't mind betting this tankard of lager that he's not a bit grateful for your trouble."

"Don't say that," replied Otto loftily; "you mustn't say anything against my friend Max, for he's a good fellow, though a bit stupid at times."

But Otto little guessed the real cause of Max's happiness; it was the very last thing he would have thought of. Max loved Marie who lived not far from the village; pretty Marie with her blue eyes, and the two bewitching little plaits that hung down her back, and Max was for once in his life lucky, for his love was returned. Unlike most of the other villagers, Marie saw that Max, in spite of his awkward ways and his blunderings, was as kindhearted and true as ever a man could be. And this was the secret of the change in Max.

So the following Sunday Max, all of a flutter and arrayed in his best, started out to ask Marie to be his wife. On his way to the little cottage he passed a spot where the lilies of the valley grew wild.

"I'll gather a bunch for Marie," he said to himself. "I know she is fond of them." So he picked a few; and was so busily occupied in making them into a bunch that he never heard footsteps approaching until they were quite close upon him.

It was Otto. He looked first at Max, and then at the flowers.

"Hello, Max!" he said, "where are you going? why, you're quite smart to-day, and I do believe you're making yourself a button-hole; you are nearly as tidy as myself, and that's saying a good deal. But where are you off to, lad?"

Max hesitated, and then said: "To that cottage yonder, to see Marie; these flowers are for her; and"—another hesitation—"I—I am going to ask her to be my wife."

If someone had told Otto he was ignorant of the game of bowls, or that there had been a flood and washed away his saw-mill, he could hardly have been more astonished. He positively gasped with surprise. Why, here, Max, whom he was patronising, whom he had taken under his wing, had fallen in love with the very girl he had himself set his affections upon! Then slowly he took off his hat, which was as usual placed on the back of his head—because he was well aware how it suited him in that position; he turned it round in his hands meditatively, all the while staring at Max; he seemed at a loss to know what to say, and there was an ugly scowl on his face. Poor Max little guessed what a storm was brewing. Then an idea came into Otto's head; he tried to shake it off, but it came again. Yes, he must say it; the lie must be told; for it was the only way out of the difficulty; he could not let Max stand in his way. So he brushed back his curls, and putting on his hat with an air of determination, he said:

"Max, you're a greater idiot than I ever took you for! what made you imagine that Marie cared for you? Why, she likes you about as much as—this stone here"—and he kicked the stone viciously; "so it's

no use asking her to be your wife. Besides," he added, and this time speaking the truth, "perhaps I am going to ask Marie the same question myself in a day or two; so now you can just go back the way you came. Can't you hear, lad? don't stand staring at me like a moonstruck owl!"

Yes, poor Max had heard all, and he turned home a sad and dejected being; the one bright period of his life was now a thing of the past, and it was his friend Otto who had taken this happiness away from him.

It never occurred to him to stand up for his own rights, and he was too simple-minded to believe for one moment that Otto was fooling him; so he trudged sadly back to the village.

"I felt sure Marie cared a little for me," he said to himself; "but Otto says no; and perhaps it's natural that she should like Otto better, he is so handsome and clever. So good-bye to you, Marie," and as he threw away the bunch of flowers he had just gathered, the trees and the fields around him seemed suddenly to become quite blurred and misty.

* * * * *

Whiz, swish; swish, whiz; was the sound that came from the saw-mill, and then a gentle swish, swish, as the saw caught the wood sending out showers of pine-scented dust. Max was hard at work. He was just pushing a fresh log towards the saw when Otto came striding in. He was in the very worst of tempers, and barely nodded a response to Max's greeting. The fact was that his pride had received a severe shock at the discovery that Max was preferred to him, for Marie had shown pretty clearly that she was not pleased to see Otto, so he knew that it was Max whom she had expected to see; he was furious at the discovery and no longer felt that same affection he had always had for Max. He looked round for something to find fault with, "*Himmel*, Max!" he exclaimed, "look at this plank; it's cut crooked!" and seizing a stick he hit Max sharply across the shoulders. Max sprang up to his full height, and flushing crimson, looked for one moment as though he were going to return the blow with good interest. Otto shrank back; he was not prepared for this; but Max turned away and continued his work without a word.

And so the friendship of these two men came to an abrupt end; and Marie was the unconscious cause of it.

Max went on mechanically with his work, Otto silently continued his; and the wheels whirled on.

At last the day's work was over, and the two men parted without a word.

Max walked slowly home. There was no one to console him there, for his father was old and deaf and generally had a grievance; so he sat by the fire and pondered and brooded in silence over his misfortunes.

All this time Otto was disporting himself in far more genial society, for he was at the *biergarten* revelling in a game of bowls.

"Well," asked someone, "how is your friend Max?"

"Oh," laughed Otto, "I am going to treat him differently in future, for he gets stupider every day; and now that he imagines himself in love there's no knowing what to do with him."

At this the men laughed hugely; the idea of Max being in love tickled their fancy immensely.

"And what is this treatment to be, friend Otto?"

"Severity, my friend, severity; but now for one more turn at the bowls, and then I must be off."

* * * * *

Otto was one of those people who have the utmost confidence in their own powers, and he fully expected that when Marie found Max never came to see her he would have no difficulty in persuading her to be his wife.

So the next day, full of his own conceit and pride, Otto asked Marie the old question; but she tossed her pretty head, and gave him a most emphatic "no." No eloquence on his part could move her, and he was obliged to go away and content himself with feeling very wrath with Max.

When he arrived at the mill he found that Max had not come, which made him still angrier; and in the meantime he began to set everything in motion; the wheels were soon flying round, and the logs placed against the saws were rapidly cut up into little white planks, smelling sweet and fresh.

Presently there was a step at the door; it was not Max, but one of the stonemasons, a friend of Otto's.

"Hello, Otto!" he said; "have you heard the news?"

"No, I've not."

"Well, the Burgomaster has sent word to say that one of us is to climb up the minster spire yonder to see if the new weather-cock is quite safe, and to clean it at the same time. The only way is outside the spire, and it's a nasty climb; however, it has got to be done; one of us must go; so we are to draw lots for it now."

A few minutes later Otto and six other men with beating hearts and anxious faces were standing round a table in the *biergarten;* they all tried to look unconcerned, but inwardly one and all fervently hoped that he would not draw the unlucky number, for there was naturally a certain amount of danger in making such an ascent.

"Now, are you ready?" said the chief mason. "The one who draws the piece of paper with the points of the compass written on it climbs the spire to-morrow; you draw first."

A good-natured looking yokel stepped solemnly up to the table, and dipping a very fat finger and thumb into the hat drew out a folded piece of paper; he opened it, and the grin on his face proclaimed that the paper was a blank.

Then another came forward, and by the relieved expression that came over his features they knew that he also had been lucky.

And after that came Otto's turn; he unfolded the piece of paper he had drawn, and there the letters N. S. E. W. met his eyes. He held up the unlucky ticket for the others to see, and then threw it down with an oath. "Just my luck!" he muttered, and turning abruptly away, left the *biergarten.*

The next morning all the village was astir, for it was the Grand Duke's birthday; flags were flying everywhere, and there was a profusion of bunting displayed from most of the houses.

In a small village news travels fast, so by this time most of the people knew that Otto was to climb the steeple. It formed quite a pleasurable little excitement for them to look forward to after the every-day routine, as it was quite a new custom, this climbing of the steeple; so shortly after mid-day they flocked out of the village and began to congregate round the church. The Burgomaster was there too, standing on the balcony of the townhall, partly to watch the people, and partly to witness Otto's ascent; for it was his idea and proposal that the weather-cock should be cleaned and generally looked after every year, and that it should take place on the Duke's birthday.

So the people eagerly awaited Otto's advent.

At last one o'clock struck. "He will be coming now," said the villagers, but they waited and Otto did not come.

The quarter past struck and Otto did not appear.

And now the crowd began to show signs of impatience; they asked one another if anything had happened; and all the time people came pouring in from neighbouring villages, and seeing the crowd in the market-place stopped to watch Otto make the ascent.

Another quarter rang out from the steeple and still Otto did not come. The Burgomaster, standing imposingly on his balcony, also became impatient. "Why is Otto so late?" he exclaimed irritably.

At last a murmur of "There he is!" ran through the crowd, as the well-known figure appeared on the turret immediately below the spire. His broad-brimmed hat with the hawk's feather was as usual placed on the back of his head, the only difference being that the brim was turned down over his face to keep the dazzling sun from off his eyes.

He waited one moment, and then very slowly and very carefully began to climb the outside of the spire, and the crowd with upturned faces watched his every movement. On he climbed until at last he reached the top.

There was a murmur of applause from the crowd when they saw him gain the weathercock; and there at the dizzy height of 380 feet, he drew from his pocket some pieces of cloth and proceeded to brighten the vane, until it shone again, sending out flashes of light each time it caught the sun.

"Bravo, Otto! Otto has climbed well!" shouted the people. And then once more there was silence when the crowd saw him begin to make the descent, which was a far more difficult task than the ascent; but at last he safely neared the turret, and the crowd began

to move away; some back to their villages, some remaining for the *fête*.

When suddenly a pigeon, frightened by the unusual noise so near to its nest, flew out with a whirr and a flutter of wings close to the climber's feet, who threw up his hands in sudden alarm, missed his footing, gave one wild clutch at the stonework, and then fell heavily into the turret below.

A scene of fearful confusion followed.

"He has fallen! Otto has fallen!" shouted the villagers, and many rushed up the steps that led to the turret.

For a few minutes there was a hushed silence of anxious expectation, and then swiftly the news ran from mouth to mouth, from ear to ear that it was Max who had climbed the spire, not Otto, and that he had been disguised in Otto's clothes.

This announcement brought the excitement to a climax; the crowd, horrified at what they had just seen, surged backwards and forwards; people ran hither and thither shouting and gesticulating in their excitement.

Then there was a movement in the crowd, and something was carried slowly into the townhall.

"*Ei!*" said the villagers in awestruck tones; "who would have thought that it was Max climbing the spire! It's wonderful! But oh, it is terrible to fall like that!"

And then followed the natural question: "Why had Max climbed the spire, and where was Otto all this time?"

* * * * *

Two whole days passed by, days of gossiping, doubt and conjecture; for Max, still unconscious, hovered between life and death, and no trace could be found of Otto; he had disappeared mysteriously and suddenly, no one knew where. The police were sent out in all directions. First of all the mill, now deserted and silent, was searched; they looked into every nook and corner, peered into the dark waters of the mill-stream, investigated the village and the neighbourhood; but all in vain.

The matter then became serious; the officials hinted at foul-play, and the only person who could have thrown any light on the subject was Max, for it was with him that Otto had been seen last; and then gradually, little by little, the suspicion that had been in the minds of many now began to be spoken out openly, and this suspicion fell on Max. Every circumstance seemed against him.

The third day there was still no news of Otto; and the excitement in the village had in no way abated, but rather increased, when it became known that Max had recovered consciousness, and that the Burgomaster intended questioning him about Otto. So a number of the villagers assembled outside the *kaufhaus*, and great was the speculating and conjecturing that went on as to what Max would say, and whether he would confess his guilt. Marie was among the

crowd, pale and wan after days of anxious waiting; her hands were clasped nervously together as she stood preparing herself to hear the worst.

Presently the Burgomaster came out; there was a troubled look on his face, and as he passed through the crowd someone ventured to ask him what Max had said; but drawing up his small person to its fullest height he waved his hand majestically, and sweeping on, vouchsafed never an answer.

This was decidedly unsatisfactory to the crowd who had been standing long under the heat of a mid-day sun, and were eagerly waiting to hear the result. However, their patience was at length rewarded, for the solution to this mystery came in a sudden and entirely unexpected manner. Thrusting his way through the dense crowd, pushing people aside in his haste, panting with exhaustion, came Otto!

For a moment the crowd thought it must be the ghost of the man they had thought dead; women screamed and crossed themselves hurriedly, but they soon saw that it was Otto in substantial form. What a change from the Otto of only a few days ago. His clothes were torn and bespattered with mud, he wore no hat, his unkempt hair hung dank and damp over his brow, and terror was written on every feature of his face.

"Where is he? where is Max?" he exclaimed in a hoarse voice.

"In the *kaufhaus*," said the crowd, pressing round him and still gazing at him in bewilderment.

"And is he?"—continued Otto, looking from one face to another in an agony of fear—"is he——?" but he could not finish the sentence; he dare not, and those standing near guessed his meaning and said: "Yes, poor Max is dying."

"*Himmel!* if he dies I shall have killed him," cried Otto. He never meant to speak aloud his thoughts, but in the horror of that moment the words escaped him unwittingly.

Immediately a dozen voices exclaimed "Why."

There was a long pause; Otto looked round for some means of escape; he would have given worlds to avoid the humiliation that was in store for him; but it was impossible with that sea of faces around him, and the thought that his friend was dying checked the lies that came glibly to his lips, and which could have saved him from this ordeal. Seeing that everything must be known sooner or later, Otto made up his mind to put a bold face on the matter and tell all, fondly hoping that his frankness would favourably impress the crowd.

So he recounted how that he had induced Max to climb the spire, and confessed, with a fine assumption of shame in his voice, that he was afraid to climb the spire himself, and had persuaded Max to impersonate him; how that he had hidden in the woods for fear of being found out when he saw Max fall, and unable to bear the

suspense longer, had now returned to the village, and ended by saying, with an air of bravado, that he hoped they would all forgive him.

But he was mistaken, for it now began to dawn upon these stolid German yokels that their ideal and hero, Otto, was after all a fraud and a miserable coward, and the lofty pinnacle on which they had set him fell rapidly to the ground. An indescribable murmur of indignation ran through the crowd. Otto heard it, and his face became livid with fear. Looking wildly round, he caught sight of an opening; through this he fled, and rushing down a narrow street for his very life, escaped; and by the time that the shades of evening had made the dark woods of the Black Forest still darker, Otto was tramping wearily through the forest, miles away from the little village.

* * * * *

For days Max's life hung by a thread. Then slowly but surely he began to recover and to regain his strength, and at last was so far convalescent as to be able to descend the old steps of the *kaufhaus*, walk slowly through the town, along the cool meadows until he came to his village; and great was his surprise to find that the villagers who had once so disliked him were now pleased to see him. Pleased! pleased was not the word for it, they were delighted; people were shaking hands with him every moment, crowding round him, clapping him on the back, shouting "*hoch! hoch!*" wondering all the time how they could have misjudged him so.

But somehow Max's steps soon turned in the direction of a certain field where the lilies of the valley grew wild; and then past that to a little cottage; and it is not difficult to imagine the rest. For a few months later Max and Marie were wedded; and great was the rejoicing when it was known that the Burgomaster had so arranged matters that Max became master of the saw-mill where once he had only been an assistant.

On that wedding-day everything seemed brightness itself; the village and the dark pine-woods were bathed in sunshine, the bridal procession was a stream of bright colouring and the bells a peal of joyful music; but in the distance could be seen through the trees the spire of the Pearl of Breisgau, and there was something upon it that glittered and glistened in the sunlight and which shone out more brightly than all the rest, and that was—*the vane.*

And thus it happened that the brightening of the vane—Max's deed of love—was a blessing in disguise, for it revealed and showed up the real characters of two men, and it was for Max the beginning of a brighter and a happier life.

This custom of climbing to the vane from the outside of the spire still continues to the present day, though never, perhaps, has the climb been so eventful, or the interest taken in the ceremony so great as on that day when the ascent was made by Max.

C. J. Kirkby Fenton.

A MIDSUMMER MEMORY.

A PICTURE lies in my memory yet,
Familiar and dear in a bygone day,
Of a Cornish beach, ere the sun was set,
While bells chimed soft o'er the tranquil bay.
Ripples of gold, touched here and there
With purple and rose, kissed the wet brown sand,
Where the spoil of the sea shone silver fair,
'Midst the fisher-folk on the rock-strewn strand.
How softly the bells chimed over the bay—
Ah! it seems to me but as yesterday!

The brown boats clustered a-near the bar,
Like a fairy fleet in the misty gold
Of the sunset hour, till faint and far
A breeze sprang out of a low cloud's fold.
Then slowly faded each soft bright hue,
And all grew colourless, cold and grey;
While wheeling seaward the curlew flew
To his rocky home in the far away:
And the bells chimed on o'er the tranquil bay—
Oh, it seems to me but as yesterday!

Do homely fisher-folk linger yet,
Till the boats sail home to the village strand,
With their silvery loads, ere the sun shall set,
And the gloaming fall, in my Cornish land?
I remember the faces bold and brown,
Of sturdy sire, and lad and lass;
And the grassy sweep of the windy down,
Where white-sailed ships round the headland pass.
Do the bells yet chime o'er that tranquil bay,
As I heard them—it seems—but yesterday?

HELEN MARION BURNSIDE.

" Do the bells yet chime o'er that tranquil bay,
As I heard them—it seems—but yesterday?"

THE GERMAN TENOR.

By George Fosbery.

MISS CONSTANCE ETHERIDGE sat before the looking-glass on her toilet table while her maid dressed her hair. Richards, an old servant of the family, who remembered Constance as a baby, was wont to assume a right to speak her mind to her young lady whenever the spirit moved her.

"Dearie me, Miss Constance, whatever is the matter? You keep a-staring through and through that pink bow beside your mirror, instead of looking at yourself in the glass to see if you can tell which is the puff-curl I have just put in and which is your own hair."

"I am very angry with you, Richards. Why do you insist upon doing my coiffure with these horrid artificial things in it?"

"Don't be absurd, Miss Constance! All the young ladies wear them nowadays."

The young girl succumbed to necessity, and protested no more. She had something else in her mind. Her thoughts wandered back to an experience of the previous evening, at one of the early balls of her first season.

The incident recalled was this. Her mother had taken her to a subscription dance. The people present were what is commonly called "a mixed lot," and Miss Etheridge meant to confine her dances to two or three intimate friends. But in the crowd of strangers she could not help noticing one gentleman who appeared to her to belong to a very different level from the herd.

A tall, well-proportioned, active youth of Saxon type, he seemed to her the ideal she had formed of the sort of man to whom she would wish to give her heart. Curiously enough this same gentleman showed that a parallel sentiment was aroused in his breast by the sight of Miss Etheridge. His look and manner betrayed the fact to her in an instant. The result was a move on his part, which, according to English etiquette, was highly reprehensible. Its nature may be best described by repeating Miss Etheridge's *naïve* confession to her mother on the way home.

"By-the-bye, Constance," inquired her mother, "who was the gentleman that danced with you several times and took you down to supper?"

"I haven't the least idea, mamma."

"Constance!" gasped Mrs. Etheridge, "what do you mean? Who introduced him to you?"

"Nobody, mamma. He came up in foreign fashion and asked me to dance. It would have been silly of me to refuse, for he danced superbly."

"Constance!" again exclaimed her mother, horrified. "I am quite shocked at you. Your conduct was most unladylike. I could make allowances for mistakes in a girl of your age, but I never thought you could be capable of such a lamentable piece of ill-breeding."

"Really, I don't see that I have done anything wicked," pleaded the girl.

"It was worse than wicked, Constance; you compromised yourself with a mere stranger, and he may be a low counter-jumper, or something."

"Nonsense, mamma dear. He is nothing of the kind. I think he is German, for he spoke with a slight accent; and that might account for his apparent rudeness in asking a stranger for a dance. In other ways he was singularly gentlemanlike."

Such was the episode. And it was of this—or rather of *him*—that Constance was brooding before her toilet-table.

Mrs. General Etheridge had an "at home" that same afternoon. Her invitations had been sent out a fortnight before. She had since taken great pains to engage some well-known singers and musicians to entertain her guests. Principal among these was Herr Bertschinger, a singer of some repute, who had lately come over to this country. She had not seen him or heard him sing, but she had heard reports about him; and great things were expected of the "new tenor."

Another great attraction was expected (and this, in Mrs. Etheridge's estimation, was the most important of all)—namely, an eligible young man—"a young man who would do beautifully for Constance," thought the anxious mother. He was Lord Herbert Ching, a son of General Etheridge's old friend and schoolfellow, the Marquis of Camberley. Lord Herbert had been educated abroad, and the Etheridges had never seen him since he was a child. He had lately returned to England, and the Marquis had written from Italy asking the General to allow his boy to call. The result was that Lord Herbert received a hearty invitation to the Etheridges' "at home."

The afternoon arrived, and shortly after the appointed hour guests came pouring in a continuous stream through Mrs. Etheridge's suite of reception rooms. Those of the musicians who had arrived early were set going to pass the time; and Mrs. Etheridge waited anxiously for the appearance of the lion of her party. After a while she became troubled at his non-arrival, and sent down a message by one of the footmen to know if Herr Bertschinger was downstairs. The answer was that he had just entered the house.

In a flutter of suspense the hostess stationed herself at the head of the stairs, and awaited the great man's approach.

Presently the butler came up and announced in stentorian tones, "Her Berchingy."

Mrs. Etheridge held out her hand to welcome the tall, fair young man who bowed to her; and then, to her dismay, she recognised in him the very youth who had violated the proprieties on the previous

evening at the subscription ball, by asking her daughter to dance without any introduction.

She felt greatly annoyed. But quickly seeing that there was no help for it but to be properly gracious, she summoned her memories of Ollendorf to her assistance, and welcomed the stranger in German.

"So glad you are at last come. We feared you would disappoint us. Herr Bertschinger—my husband—General Etheridge." And the host and guest shook hands.

The young man, noticing that he was addressed in German, made a suitable reply in the same language, and bowed.

Mrs. Etheridge saw that it was impossible to prevent a meeting between the "impudent fellow" and her daughter, and that the best way to avoid anything in the nature of scandal was to go through the form of an introduction between them.

"Constance, my dear——"

Miss Etheridge, who was a few yards away, turned at her mother's call; and, to her astonishment, she found that the very man was being correctly presented to her who had raised her parent's ire the previous night.

Still greater was the astonishment of the stranger, who had strolled home that morning in the small hours, bitterly reproaching himself with not having learnt the name of a certain fair partner, whose pretty face he was never likely to set eyes on again. In sheer surprise he looked from daughter to mother, and from mother to daughter, and then bowed awkwardly.

Constance flushed to the roots of her hair, and her mother noted the fact angrily. So Mrs. Etheridge turned promptly to the new-comer saying politely, in her best Ollendorf—

"Will you do us the honour of singing something?"

Herr Bertschinger assumed a modest air of expostulation, and pretended that he felt scarcely equal to the task of performing before so distinguished and critical an audience. It may be mentioned, in passing, that the more the "artistes" (as they called themselves) tried to entertain the distinguished and critical audience, the more indefatigably the distinguished and critical audience chattered in competition.

But Herr Bertschinger's scruples were eventually overcome. Constance Etheridge watched him as he followed her mother to the piano.

"Oh! I forgot," exclaimed Mrs. Etheridge in English, "your music—have you brought it?"

"I have brought it in my head," replied the German, smiling.

"How handsome he is!" thought Constance.

"What insufferable airs these foreigners assume!" thought her mother. "To think that my Constance—but hush!"

The musician touched the keys, being his own accompanist. After a modest prelude he broke into one of the ballads that, although

we English are not a truly musical nation, we may claim as home-made, and be proud of.

"Why doesn't the fellow sing in German?" asked everyone of his neighbour, though not one guest in ten could put together the simplest sentence in that tongue. "Why does he sing in English?"

"Swagger!" was the general verdict.

The singer's voice was a pure and "legitimate" tenor. To the true musicians present it was evident that he had learnt from the best masters. There was nothing in his style to suggest native vulgarity, or that assumption of superiority only too common among "lions" from over the water.

The ballad closed amid general applause; indeed the "bravos" and "bravissimos" burst out on the penultimate bar of the melody, and the singer finished for the sake of his art alone.

Only one of those who were present refrained from any outward sign of applause. Constance Etheridge, in truth, feared to show what an influence over her the singer possessed. She stood at a distance, with downcast eyes, until a gentle voice aroused her.

"You did not like my poor song, Miss Etheridge. And yet—and yet I sang more for your sake than for anyone else's."

She was at a loss to reply. Mrs. Etheridge came to the rescue, in the very nick of time, with an excuse for separating the pair.

Later on, the "tenor" was pressed "to oblige" a second time. He did so with evident reluctance, this time singing in German. Everybody voted that his voice was simply charming. Only a few complained that it wouldn't fill the Albert Hall—which was true, though uncalled for.

Meantime, Mrs. Etheridge took very good care that Herr Bertschinger and Constance did not come together again.

"I told you so, Constance. The man is a professional singer, and I dare say no better than a mere adventurer."

Oh, insular reasoning!

At length the young man who was the cause of all this maternal solicitude came to take his leave. Mrs. Etheridge complimented him, in bad German, on his delightful music, and the General accompanied him to the foot of the stairs, where he slipped an envelope nervously into the hand of the successful vocalist.

When the latter had passed out into the street, the General inquired of a servant "if anything had been seen of Lord Herbert Ching, eh?"

A visitor at that moment entering the house seemed to overhear the name. He was a short, fat, red-faced man, who might be any age.

"Dat's me," he said, shaking hands with the General. "I haf zo many appointments this after-mittag to geep, zat I am a leetle late. You must eggsguse me, Cheneral Etheridge, I bray you."

"Well!" muttered the old gentleman to himself, "I'd be hanged

if I would bring up a boy of mine abroad in this disgusting fashion. I can't think what Camberley can have been about." Then he added aloud, "Will you come upstairs?"

"Mit bleasure," assented Lord Herbert, following him.

By this time the guests were beginning to troop out again. They had heard the "new tenor," and nothing in the world would keep them there any longer.

When Lord Herbert Ching said "Ow d' you do?" to his hostess, the general exodus was in full swing, and for twenty minutes afterwards a few of the most intimate friends of the family occupied the attention of the General and his wife and daughter.

At last, in despair of ever getting a word in edgeways with such people, the latest arrival stumped again down the stair without a word of good-bye, and with some very forcible Teutonic expletives falling from his lips.

"Well, in all my porn days!" he growled, as he took up his hat and went his way, "I vas in such an inzulding way neffer pefore dreedet. I vill do-morrow to Chermany go back. I 'av' put myzelf to gonzideraple ingonfenience for zese ztuck-up Eenglizh; but I vill ztant it no more—tamt if I do!" And away he went.

Anon, when the last guest had departed, and the General and Mrs. Etheridge stood in sole possession of their empty suite of reception rooms, the lady of the house heaved a sigh of relief, and said to her husband:

"There! Thank goodness, that's over! I think everything went off splendidly. But what a lucky escape poor dear Constance had! We won't engage Herr Bertschinger again if *I* can help it."

"Why, my dear? He seemed very well-behaved, I thought. What's the matter with the young man?"

"Matter!" exclaimed Mrs. Etheridge. "Everything's the matter. He's only a common musician, and he had the impudence to make friends with Constance at the ball last night, without any introduction whatever. I never heard of such a thing."

"Well, for my part," returned the General, "I thought him as nice-looking and pleasant-mannered a lad as you would wish to see; the very reverse of that awful outsider, Lord Camberley's boy."

When Miss Etheridge was once more in the hands of her maid, changing her pretty dress for dinner, the following conversation took place.

"And, if you please, Miss Constance—what did you think of the *primer donner?*—that's what they call the principal singing gentleman, isn't it?"

Constance laughed lightly. "The *prima donna*, as you call him, Richards, sang as I never heard anyone sing before."

"Oh—h—h—h!" remarked the maid, her voice travelling up and down the scale significantly. "By the way, miss, he left his music behind, on the hall table."

"His music! Why, he said that he did not bring any."

"Leastways his name is in gold letters on the leather cover, miss."

"What! Herr Bertschinger's?"

"That's it, I think, Miss Constance."

Constance reflected for some moments, and then frightened Richards half out of her wits by jumping about and clapping her hands.

"I see it all, Richards! What an awful muddle! Oh, what fun!" And then she added more soberly: "But will he ever come here again?"

"Who, miss?" asked the maid.

"Never you mind," answered her young mistress as she left the room hurriedly at the sound of the dinner-bell.

At the breakfast table next morning the General read aloud in amazement a letter which he had just opened. It ran thus:—

"DEAR GENERAL ETHERIDGE,—I enjoyed myself very much at your interesting 'at home' yesterday. It was a great honour to be asked to sing, and it gave me much pleasure to do so, but I was rather surprised on getting home and opening your envelope to find the enclosed cheque within it. As it appears to have been intended for some one else, I will not attempt further explanation. With kind regards to Mrs. and Miss Etheridge and yourself,

"Yours sincerely,

"HERBERT CHING."

The mistake was now obvious. Lord Herbert Ching had been mistaken for Herr Bertschinger—and *vice versâ*. It was not difficult to perceive how the awkward error had arisen. The slight similarity in sound between the names of Lord Herbert Ching and Herr Bertschinger, the initial blunder committed by the butler when announcing the arrival of the former, and the imperfect hearing of Lord Herbert's name by the German in the hall, supplied the necessary clues.

Needless to say that, so far as the young nobleman was concerned, the unhappy misunderstanding soon patched itself up. "The new tenor," however, was by no means so easily appeased; and, though it was ingeniously put to him that he had been mistaken for a real live lord, he was not satisfied until the cheque which he had not earned was delicately pressed upon his acceptance.

"You know, Herbert," said Mrs. Etheridge some time after, "I should never have forgiven anyone else but you for dancing with Constance without an introduction."

"I should never have forgiven myself," replied Lord Herbert laughing, "if my little Constance hadn't sprung to it so readily."

"Oh, you bad boy!" exclaimed the outraged matron.

And the wedding-day was fixed accordingly.

SOME STRANGE STORIES.

"Tell us, ye ghosts,
Will none of you in pity
To those ye left behind, reveal the secret?"—*Blair.*

THOSE of us who stumble at belief in the supernatural, may find it easier to discuss mysteries when the term super-material is used. Those who are not ashamed to acknowledge that inexplicable things do happen, can claim fellowship with a goodly host: from the days of Job, and Jannes and Jambres, the Witch of Endor and Daniel; and through all the procession of years, from the date when the graves were opened in Jerusalem, and many bodies of them that slept arose and walked about the city, and appeared unto many; *not to all.* Only the spiritually-minded can, it would seem, converse with spirits reclothed.

The writer of this paper will relate nothing herein that is not true and absolutely worthy of trust, within personal experience, or that of well-known and excellent friends, none of whom could be impeached even by enemies, as credulous fools.

A clever divine was, for many years, rector of a country parish, and built, for his own convenience, a handsome parsonage, fitting up therein a library, replete with every literary luxury, and rich in comfortable appliances. Here he, for the most part, lived for a long period, and within those four delightful walls were written the books and pamphlets which eventually raised him to the dignity of a bishop. He bade farewell, with much regret, to the old home and particular nest he had arranged for himself, and had occupied so long and happily; but he was married and the father of a family. A new and more stately house became his happy home again, while the parish he had vacated fell into the hands of another.

Some years passed.

The new vicar of the country parish was one day writing his sermon within the closed doors of the bishop's old library, now more modestly called "the study." He was disturbed by hearing a hoarse, distressed voice exclaiming, "Mary! Mary!" The speaker seemed at his elbow, yet the room had no second occupant; and the double doors shut off extraneous noises. As he looked about in surprise, the call for "Mary! Mary!" came more urgently still.

He rose and went to the window. The sun was shining. All was quiet without. No one was in sight. He resumed his work. It did not progress, however. He had hardly taken up his pen when he laid it down again. Drip, drip, drip, as of some liquid slowly flowing disturbed him now.

"Rain dropping off the eaves, and I thought it had been fine all the morning!" he muttered, again going to the window. His impression had been correct. The day was glorious, and he could not discover whence or where the dropping came from. Yet he distinctly heard this drip, drip, drip.

Once more he began to write, but his sermon was doomed. In came the vicaress full of household cares. Would he have the cook in and reason with her? She had just announced that she must go home at once. Her mother was dying and had sent for her. "And yet," said the irate lady, "the foolish girl confesses she has had no letter or message; 'only a call' to return immediately."

"H'm—Is her name Mary?" inquired the vicar suddenly.

"You know it is," the vicaress replied. "Won't you speak to her and make her listen to reason?"

"Yes, yes," he said absently; but a little later, when he learned that, at this same hour, on this very day, his predecessor had committed suicide, under the stress of some sudden brain-pressure: that he had hoarsely called his wife Mary, and that she, alas! had not come to his assistance until the life-blood had drip-dripped away; the vicar began to think he needed some one to reason with himself.

The most strange occurrence was related direct to the narrator by the person to whom it occurred. The story was not volunteered, but elicited, the teller being a silent man who was by no means anxious to narrate his one weird experience.

There is a lonely, lovely darkly-shadowed lake in Ireland called Lough Derg, famous alike for good fishing and sudden squalls. My friend went to spend a fortnight with an aunt, whose house was near the water. Her rector lived on the opposite shore.

They were all at lunch one wild October day, when the lady looking up from her plate suddenly exclaimed: "Why, there are the C. boys coming up the drive! what a day for them to venture across the lake; and we have eaten up everything!"

She left the table, and went to the kitchen to order the hasty preparation of some fresh dish for the coming guests. Her daughter and nephew crossed the room, stood at the window, watching the young men approaching, and commenting upon the habit the elder youth had of swinging his arm as he walked. My friend then went and opened the hall-door to admit these frequent guests, that there might be no delay in their entrance on such a blustering day, the servants being occupied with their mistress, who at this moment came forward from the back of the house.

"Well, where are they?" she inquired, going to the door. "Not here! Oh, I know their tricks! They are hiding round the corner just to make us hunt and feel foolish. They are a pair of scamps!"

But they were not round the corner, nor visible any longer in any direction. The home party had finally to conclude that their young

friends had changed their minds and given up the purposed visit for some other expedition. However, in a couple of hours, they were horrified to hear of a terrible boat accident. The rector's sons had been rowing themselves across the lake, intending to lunch with their friends, when a sudden squall overturned their boat, and both were drowned. They were the only children of their parents, and the catastrophe was sad and grievous.

Hypnotism was as fashionable forty or fifty years ago as now. The two following stories I relate direct from the lips of the leading actors in them.

A mesmerist and clairvoyant named Alexis Didier was quite a power in Paris in the middle of this century. His peculiar province lay in the diagnosing of diseases too obscure for correct treatment by ordinary physicians; but he was also a fashionable adjunct to great people's entertainments. My friends were at a large evening party of this sort. Their hostess brought them forward to test the skill of the leading hero by asking some question of him. They could think of nothing better than to request him to describe their home drawing-room, and having done so, they whisperingly decided among themselves that it was a foolish test; for Alexis had probably been in England and having seen one such apartment, it would be a case of *ex uno disce omnes*, as, specially at that period, reception rooms were arranged very much on one pattern. Accordingly, as they expected, he proceeded to describe the usual style, and carried it out very correctly. Their French hostess listened, and smiled, and inquired if they were satisfied.

"Oh, perfectly!" they replied. "He has told us all the leading features, even to the china ornaments, gilt clock, and glass-drop candlesticks on the mantle-piece."

They were turning away; but their entertainer was not satisfied. She perceived incredulity lurking amid their compliments. "Could you see nothing more exact or significant?" she asked entreatingly of the somnambulistic Didier. He sighed. "I see on the mantle-piece *une vielle figure*," he said reluctantly; "I can see no more." "Oh thanks, thanks," they all three replied, "that is truly wonderful!" and they hurried away, fearful of closer questioning concerning their satisfaction; for, in truth, as they all agreed, this last test had spoiled the whole. There was no old face of any description on their mantleshelf.

Having returned home, full of the experiences of their travels, they related this anecdote as a good story to their parents one day at the dinner-table.

"An arrant humbug, no doubt about it!" the father exclaimed. "Of course he had the pattern by heart, and then spoiled all by trying to go into particulars. There never was any old face, or figure either, on the chimney-piece; nor over it, for that matter, so far as I can recall: and I have known it long enough——Eh? what is

it, Simmons?" for the butler, an old family servant, had ventured to interrupt the conversation to which he had listened with interest.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but you are all wrong," he said. "There is a very strange old figure and face there, on the back of the clock; and the oddest thing is that I knew nothing about its existence until last week, when I had to remove the clock for some of the plaister to be mended. I cleaned the case up before replacing it, and saw the old face, at once, for the first time."

There was of course a general stampede upstairs to the drawing-room, and there, sure enough, the butler's words and Didier's second sight proved correct.

The next tale is as trivial, and yet quite as curious. I had it recently from the lips of the gentleman to whom it happened.

He was in London seeing life, and was induced by a friend to pay a visit to a hypnotist. It was evening, and as they ascended the stairs to the room where the *séances* were held, whiffs of many dinner-odours reached their nostrils. No doubt this fact influenced my friend. Having paid his fee he was allowed to ask some question, and could think of nothing more searching than the rather silly inquiry: "What hour do they dine at home to-day, and what is the *menu?*"

The somnambulist named the hour as seven and proceeded gravely to state the bill of fare.

"All right. Good-evening, and thank you," the questioner said turning on his heel and leaving the premises at once. His friend could hardly overtake his hasty steps. "I wish I had my money back from that arrant cheat," he exclaimed angrily. "My people live, as you know, quite in the country. My father is an old sultan, and never alters his hours or habits. The family laws are like those of the Medes and Persians. They *always* dine at two and *never* have those new-fangled dishes that fellow rattled out."

"But you might inquire—the man has told me extraordinary things," remonstrated his companion.

"Inquire? as if I don't know!" jeered the other angrily. But all the same, when next writing to his sister he said jestingly, in a post-script: "So I hear you dined at seven last Friday, and had so-and-so for dinner."

To this epistle he had a speedy and irate reply.

"I wish you would tell me what meddlesome person tells tales about our private concerns. If Harry Colthurst did arrive unexpectedly last Friday, and if, to suit him, we chose to dine late, and have those dishes he asked for, I must call it exceedingly impertinent of anyone to write you or anyone else word of it: and I cannot conceive who could have done so."

This was not the only strange experience which befell the narrator. His career was adventurous and very varied.

As a young man, he was in the habit of paying such long and frequent visits to some elderly relatives, that their house was like a

second home to him, and a certain apartment was always called "his room." But he went into the army and the old folk died. Their household was dispersed. The place fell into new hands. Mr. Long-clothes, whose name was as odd as his life, made a friendship abroad with some wealthy *nouveaux riches*, who invited him on a visit to a handsome place they had recently purchased in England.

The house was a charming one, done up in the newest style of luxury. His sleeping-chamber was the perfection of comfort; and yet, when he went to bed, sleep was impossible. He twisted and turned, tormented by an odd sense of familiarity, and yet he knew well he had never been in this neighbourhood before.

Suddenly, in the darkness he put out his hand and caught one of the carved posts of the couch and felt it up and down.

"I could swear to it," he exclaimed as joyfully as a man speaks who finds at last a desired clue.

He struck a light and pulled the bedstead further down from the wall. This enabled him to go behind it, and then he found, as he had expected, the name Judith carved into the head-piece behind his pillow. This was the very bedstead he always slept in, as a youth, in his old relative's house. At their death it was sold, and these new friends had purchased it.

Something not very dissimilar befell him on arriving once at Malta, where cholera then raged. The first news he received, on landing, was of the death of a friend, who had fallen a victim the previous week to it. His first task, on shore, was the purchase of fittings and furniture. Everything was ship-shape by night in his sleeping quarters, but, as on the other occasion, sleep alone was wanting. That would not come, however closely wooed. In its place he had waking visions of his dead friend. A panorama of his death scenes displayed itself before his closed eyes. He could think only of him and of nothing but his death, until, at length, the distress became intolerable. He rose and spent the rest of the night in an arm-chair.

His first expedition next day was to the dealer from whom he had bought his furniture.

"You need not make any denials," he exclaimed, "or give me any explanations. The fact remains that you yesterday sold to me the bed in which Captain B—— died last week."

And it was so.

My friend, who is now dead, having run through a couple of fortunes, was reduced so low, presently, that he was glad to accept the then rather despised position of paymaster in his regiment which was ordered abroad.

A young officer in the regiment had his fortune told by a chiromancer, unfortunately for him, for the lady did not scruple to explain that the lines of his hand foretold early death through his own instrumentality. At the time the young captain laughed at the ridiculous

prediction: but not so a little later, when he fell ill, and consequently into low spirits. He refused nourishment, saying it was of no use to try to recover, as he was a doomed man: and thus he accomplished the prediction, being really the cause of his own death.

Of course a conscientious fortune-teller does not put into words any ominous portent seen in the hand. I was the recipient once of the astonishment and dismay of one who had told the hand of a mutual acquaintance. "There was sudden death in it, but of course I did not tell her."

The lines did indeed seem misleading, but in a very short time this unhappy lady was killed by jumping out of her carriage, the horse she was driving having run away,

Joseph Meyer of Oberammergau is a well-known and trustworthy man, as well as an inimitable wood carver. It is he who acts the chief part in the Passion Spiel. I had the following coincidence from him direct.

Lord Frederick Cavendish spent part of the last autumn of his life at Oberammergau, lodging there in the house of this well-known man. On one occasion he had the ill-luck to break one of Frau Meyer's heirlooms, an old-fashioned wine-glass. She looked down the dinner-table at the offender with a sombre face. "I am very sorry," he said; "I see we are thirteen. If any misfortune comes of the number it is bound to fall upon me now." Within a few months he met his death at the hands of the Fenians in Phœnix Park.

We do not any of us believe in gipsies, and yet their predictions occasionally come strangely true.

A pair of gay girls were taking a country walk, not very far from the scene of this last-named tragedy, when they came upon a Romany camp. An old woman popped out of her tent at once with the usual offer.

"Tell your fortunes, my pretty ladies, just for a piece of silver each to cross your hands with good luck!"

The money was produced, and the elder girl held out her palm first. The old woman scanned it closely—said nothing concerning the lines, but asked to see her companion's hand.

"I'll tell it to you together," she exclaimed, "and ye may share it as ye like atween ye both. One of you young ladies will be dead before the year is out, and the other will be married to the richest man in England."

One of these Irish girls died shortly after, of a fever, while the other is a leading power in London society now, and entertains Royalty.

This story ought to have followed the other anecdotes on palmistry, but may, perhaps, as fitly precede a curious tale also of a gipsy. I have the narrative direct from a friend, to whom it was all of vivid interest, he having been the leading actor in it. He is a country squire. Having one day sent his groom to the nearest town, seven miles off, he was grievously put out when the man returned, late in the

evening, with a lame story of having lost his master's valuable mare and trap. Having laid down the reins for one moment to hand a list of orders over a shop counter, on his return to the street the mare and cart had disappeared.

The squire was a hot-tempered man, and at once leaped to the conclusion that his groom had sold the mare and dog-cart, pocketed the money, and composed this very unlikely tale on his walk home. The man indignantly denied this foolish accusation, and declared he had spent the afternoon and evening subsequent to his loss in searching vainly for any clue to the lost property.

Half a dozen persons started now on a similar quest. The squire himself spent the whole night prowling over the country. When morning dawned it found him cross and weary and many miles from home. The early rays of the sun illumined a settlement of gipsies. Two girls were awakening within their wretched tent, an old woman was plucking a turkey behind a tree. The whimsical idea struck him that he might as well consult the gipsy. She came forward to tell his fortune unsolicited, and he held out his hand.

"Am I married or single?" he inquired, as a preliminary test of her powers.

"Married," was the unhesitating reply. So far right.

"Children?"

"They are even now. They were odd not long back. You don't believe in me, but you may go home and make your mind easy. What is lost is found and will return to you to-night."

He threw her a coin and departed, glancing all about the camp to see if perchance his mare could be hidden anywhere among those thieves' tents, but an old donkey browsing was the only steed near.

He did not return home, but made his way to the nearest town and to his club, full of ill-temper and of physical discomfort. It was evening when he walked in at his own gate, and in the golden light of the setting sun he saw his mare and dog-cart preceding him up the drive, driven by a stranger. Something had frightened the animal, no doubt, in the street. She had started off on her own account, and a farmer more than a dozen miles away, and in an opposite direction from the gipsies' camp, had recognised and brought her home uninjured.

This is a strange tale, but not more curious than the two stories with which I purpose completing this paper. They shall conclude it, but have themselves no conclusion; nor can I offer any explanation of their mysteries, nor attempt any solution of the tales.

We will take the shortest first.

A lady was left a widow with a large family of young children. She had good means. The eldest son was heir to a handsome country place where they all lived, but she was a sad and helpless invalid, unable to leave her bed. Everything went very smoothly

however. The mistress of the house proved an admirable manager. Her children led happy natural lives and were hampered with only one restriction. For two hours daily each afternoon their mother was invisible. Under no stress of circumstances could her seclusion be intruded upon. This law was as one of the Medes and Persians.

Years passed quietly and most prosperously, but a day came when all this ended.

The eldest son met with an accident out shooting, and was carried home insensible. None of the young people had ever needed a doctor. The mother, though an invalid, never employed one. A stranger was now hastily summoned. "The young man's leg must come off at once," he said to the eldest of the family. "Has he no parents?—a mother! I should like to have her consent without delay."

The terrified eldest daughter listened with a pallid face. "I cannot go to mamma now," she faltered. "It is impossible."

"My dear young lady, this is a matter of life and death. I am ready to break the matter to her myself if you wish. In fact, that will be the best arrangement, as she is an invalid; but there must be no delay; and I cannot work without her consent."

"It is not that," the girl said; "but, in the afternoon, at this hour, she cannot be spoken to. No one ever sees her from four to six."

The doctor moved towards the door. "I am going," he said. She ran before him, overcome by a sort of panic. "No! No! No!" she cried. "If anyone goes it must be I." She ran upstairs. A few moments later there was a shriek heard, and then a fall. When the sacred precincts were again outraged, the girl lay insensible on the floor with terror depicted on her face, and the mother was dead.

The operation was, however, successfully performed. The youth recovered, came of age, married, and the other members of the household then removed to a new home. Through all these years and changes it was whispered amongst friends that the eldest sister had assumed and maintained the practice of two hours' daily strict seclusion in the afternoon; and a further hint was given occasionally that thereon turned the exceptional family prosperity.

Not long since an incredulous family friend, being indignant at such rumours, undertook to prove them untrue by spending a complete day with the eldest daughter. She was made a most welcome though an uninvited guest, and the young hostess was pleasant and entertaining, until the fatal hour drew near. She became increasingly abstracted and put out in manner then, and finally excused herself on the plea of business. The lady retired, and the secret remained unknown.

I have now come to the last strange story about to be related here. It is of a haunted house.

There is an old town in Ireland still surrounded with walls. It is noted as the centre of a rebellious district. It was also in ancient days

a favourite spot for concealing smuggled goods, being intersected with secret passages and underground rooms. Ruined castles and modern abbeys, monasteries and convents abound. It is perhaps as well to make this statement: although it has, so far as we, the leading actors in the matter, are aware, nothing to do with the story.

One of our home party was ordained and became the curate of a rich and kind old rector here; and in due course took possession of the house allotted to the junior parson. This was and is a most prosaic modern building, standing four square outside the walled town, in a field, with a garden in front running down to the railway line; and having for its only neighbour a carpenter's shed uninhabited by night.

A local banker formerly had this house, but was shot dead on his own doorstep in the midst of a Fenian outbreak. After his demise it was used by a rich tradesman, said to have been an habitual drunkard while there; and after him the next inhabiter was the curate who preceded our fledgling, who here began parochial life with the help and countenance of a sister and one domestic: a worthy little maid, the daughter of a family nurse.

Everything went smoothly and pleasantly.

The young curate's house was partly furnished and beautified from the vicarage, where the young people were constant guests. Having been nearly a month in residence the curate called one day at the police station to ask that some patrolling should be done outside his dwelling, as runaway knocks annoyed the servant at night.

"All right, sir. I'll look after them boys," was the cheerful response.

Meeting the constables a few days later, however, the curate reproached them. "I really wish you would come our way sometimes at night," he said. "We are quite tormented. The annoyance goes on up to near midnight."

The sergeant stared.

"Why, sir," he said, "my men have been about every evening since, and have seen no one. To-night I will put one of them in-doors, if you like. With two outside we are sure to catch them."

They did not, however, although the knocking was kept up vigorously. It became a frequent matter to send at least one policeman in-doors, and very shortly all the neighbouring gentry and farmers came, in turns, or together, to the curate's house at night in hopes of solving the mystery of the uncanny noises and manifestations there; but from that day to this no one has ever been any the wiser.

The knocking soon changed its venue, as well as its character.

Four bedrooms opened off a small landing. Some frightened person seemed to be within one or another of the rooms, usually within one occupied by the curate's sister and the young domestic, who refused to remain under present circumstances if compelled to sleep alone.

The knocking began now on the door with a tone as of one

anxious to get out. The urgency and sound of the entreating knocks increased until the noise seemed created by an iron hammer, vigorously used. On opening the door no cause could ever be discovered. Fifteen persons were assembled one night endeavouring to catch the ghost by systematic search, but all in vain.

This disturbance would go on until two and three o'clock on some occasions. At other times it would subside about or before midnight. Sometimes all was quiet throughout, but it was hard to lie down and seek rest amid such real or possible surroundings.

Soft footsteps were also heard pattering up and down the short, steep stairs, down which also tumbled at intervals cart-loads as of invisible coal or stones. A young policeman fled from the house one night in pallid terror, declining ever again to seek to unearth unearthly enemies.

Through it all the young curate and his sister endeavoured to keep a brave heart, even going so far as to hold a service within the walls to exorcise the spirits, if spirits they were. He wrote to his predecessor in office, and learned from him that the house had been so uncanny that it was quite too much for him and his wife. They had left the place as soon as possible.

While this went on the old rector came down one day on a tour of inspection, certain that he could track the ghost. He could not, but advised the curate to make his sister change her bed-room; as within her present apartment he had visited a former tenant dying a very terrible death.

This advice was taken, and undoubtedly when this particular chamber was vacated, the disturbances abated, although the house was never as other houses.

What was called the haunted room was now set aside for guests. One unbelieving visitor was allowed to occupy it. Next morning he packed up his portmanteau and said the air of the place did not suit his constitution. On another occasion a guest invited himself. It was thought fair game to put him into this, the only convenient spare room. He was young and sturdy. Also by no means nervous. Neither did he make a long stay. He spent his time during the dark hours exploring the premises with a lamp in hand. All the doors in the house would, on some days, open without hands; and even be flung inwards with violence. There were also many other manifestations; but enough has been said to show that there are mysteries impossible of solution, which must be left unsolved.

The next curate did not occupy any of the four upper rooms, and did not remain in occupation long.

ALICE QUARRY.

COMING HOME.

AN afternoon in late autumn.

The little seaport in the far north in expectation to receive its weekly guest—the mail steamer. And here at last she comes round the point, with a good deal of her red hull showing below the black, as she pitches in the heavy sea. Now she slows up right into the harbour, for the tide is high; and ropes are flung ashore and there is a good deal of shouting across the narrowing gap of smooth water; the engine-bells are clanging and the water is lashed into a turmoil by the screw; the much-enduring fenders are held over the side and take another squeeze uncomplainingly.

Rattle over the gangway and step ashore, ye shivering voyagers!

Why, there is hardly any one to respond to the invitation: only three or four passengers! Foremost among them is a tall, bearded, sunburnt man, with the air of the traveller about him, who looks round the place as he lands with a peculiar glance of pleasure. And however chilled he may be with the biting wind which sweeps in from the open sea, he has a warm glow enough at his heart—for this is Home. Surely it is the sweetest word in our language; and to the long exiled it has a charm which cannot be put into words; it is too sacred.

John Trevanion has been thinking of this moment for months—for years. No wonder his eyes glisten as he steps on the familiar ground again after twelve long years of absence. During this last day or two—since he has reached England—he has been reviewing his old life again; every trivial incident of his boyhood, right up to the time when he was of age; and then a feeling of shame comes over him, and he despises himself as he thinks what happened then. Yet he cannot for the life of him help dwelling on the dark spot in his life and torturing himself with bitter, bitter memories of it!

It was a very simple record—that of his life at home with his mother.

Old William Trevanion had died when his son was quite a child; and John's thoughts of his father were shadowy at the best: it was his mother alone whom he had known and loved.

After the death of her husband, Mrs. Trevanion had only lived for her son: all her cares were for him. With a mother's unselfishness—and how great that is, who can tell?—she had placed John first, herself last, from the very outset. And John had accepted the position with a boy's selfishness—and is any one more selfish than a boy? Loving his mother, he loved himself more; and his selfishness increased with his years.

The great trouble came from a woman—*cherchez la femme;* it is

still true. Edith Copeland had turned the heads of several young men in the town; John Trevanion's among them. He was infatuated with her: those who saw with clearer eyes wondered that an educated young fellow who had lived with such a refined woman as Mrs. Trevanion could see anything in the girl!

Miss Copeland was an accomplished flirt; she kept John in a fever of delighted expectation for weeks—weeks during which he was deaf to his mother's advice and entreaties—and then she calmly and deliberately threw him over for a newer and richer suitor who suddenly appeared upon the scene in the little drama.

When Trevanion found himself jilted in this cool fashion, he went nearly mad; perhaps he suffered more from the wound to his pride than from anything else. He reviled all womankind, and—I am ashamed to write it—he turned upon his mother, who would have given her life to secure her son's happiness, and reproached her with being the cause of his dismissal. She had never liked the girl, he said, and she had been working for her own ends. Now that she had succeeded, he hoped she was satisfied. He was made wretched for life; would that please her? Of one thing he was certain, he would stay there no longer—to be made a laughing-stock by all the town—to witness Edith's marriage with his rival. And when Mrs. Trevanion tried to reason with him, to show that she had no hand in his abrupt dismissal, he broke away in wrath, and without another word of farewell left the town that same night.

From that time—twelve years ago—he had never seen his mother. He had taken ship for Australia and tried to forget even her. As for the Copeland affair, his heart was very speedily cured of that passion, and the image of the young lady faded with a swiftness that was surprising. He tried, I say, to forget his home and her who had been his best friend. Of course he could not forget. After a year he sent home his address by an acquaintance returning to England. He was too proud that the first advance should come from him, but he would generously give his mother a chance to write and forgive him.

He felt by this time that he needed forgiveness; he had got as far as that.

No answer came from home. The address was mislaid and never delivered. But Trevanion waited and hoped, and in his miserable pride he could not bring himself to write that humbling letter. He buried himself in business, he became rich, and he took no pleasure in his wealth or what it brought him. At last the longing for home was too strong to be resisted, and here he is at the last stage of the long journey.

Trevanion, I say, has been going over the old story; and if ever a man was filled with remorse, with rage at his own folly, with a consuming desire to wipe out the past, with a craving to hear again the tones of the loving voice he remembers so well—this is the man who

now steps ashore, lonely and forlorn enough, without a soul to know him or to greet him, but comforted with the blessed feeling that he has entered the haven of refuge at last. What a fool he has been to put off the return so long!

Trevanion leaves his luggage in charge of a man upon the quay, and walks off into the town. He is so altered from the beardless youth of the long ago that he is not afraid of being recognised. Indeed he has already seen two or three well-known faces which stare suspiciously at him as at a stranger.

The place looks exactly the same, he thinks; not a feature in the landscape seems to be altered. He has himself been through so much, that it is quite surprising to find everything as he knew it in his boyhood, and the people looking very little older. There is the old well-remembered smell of tar and rigging and fish along the quayside; the old harbour-master is standing looking up the harbour out to sea, his hand held up to shade his eyes from the glare of the setting sun, as Trevanion has seen him stand hundreds of times: everything the same everywhere.

The stranger turns up the main street, and as he does so a large brass plate strikes his eye—"T. Lumley, Shipping Agent."

With a sudden thrill he remembers that this is his old rival, and he looks at the house with a good deal of interest. They are just lighting up inside, and Trevanion cannot resist the impulse to look in.

A stout, coarse-looking, well-nourished lady, with brilliantly red cheeks, is seated at the table. She is very showily dressed and is decked out with a profusion of cheap jewellery. Trevanion gives a great start as he recognises the Edith Copeland of old. Gracious powers! is *that* the girl he loved, for whom he was ready to sacrifice everything? He had thought he should have died when she jilted him. *That* the girl for whom he used to sigh day and night for so many weeks? And—oh, humiliating, dreadful thought!—it was for her that he had quarrelled with his mother, with the best mother that any one ever had in this world. It was for her he had wounded the dearest heart that ever beat.

He turns aside from the window with a bitter look upon his face. He is beginning to understand his own folly at last.

But he will make amends now, he thinks. He will be the comfort of his mother's declining years; he will try and make her forget the past; he will see that her life is made happy henceforward.

He now quickens his pace as he walks up the long street. He had felt at first a half desire to linger before entering the old house once more; now he strides along, impatient to be there. He wonders whether his mother will have altered very much. Most of the people he has recognised seem so little changed that he hopes for few signs of age; but the hair may be greyer, he thinks, and the kind face more wrinkled. Trevanion has brought some presents home with him which he knows his mother will like. There is an Indian shawl which

he thinks will surprise and please her. He is getting quite near now; his heart begins to beat more quickly.

The sun has now set and darkness is coming on fast: lights begin to shine from behind windows, and by contrast it seems to become more cold and miserable in the street. At last he sees the old place not twenty yards before him. It is still all dark; they have not begun to light up inside. He goes straight up to the door in a fever of expectation, and knocks. The noise echoes within as though the place were empty. No one comes. He knocks again harder. It strikes a chill to his heart that he should have thus to wait for admittance to his own home. He listens and can hear no sound within, and he steps back into the roadway and looks up at the front.

All the windows are dark; all are closed and fastened. The place has a neglected look about it. He notices now that the doorsteps are all covered with dust, the paint is worn off the door, the knocker is nearly rusted off its hinge, some of the windows at the side are broken. The house must be empty; his mother has moved, no doubt.

Trevanion tries not to feel disappointed; he must inquire where Mrs. Trevanion lives now. He has never for a moment thought she would leave the old place; she had often told him as much. The chill at his heart is more perceptible now; he feels cold all over.

As he turns out of the porch into the cheerless street again, he sees an odd figure in the roadway that he knows well—old Betty Breckon, who used to sell them milk and eggs and such things, and who at this moment has her milk-can in her hand. She does not look a day older than when he left home. He goes up to her and calls out:

"Why, Betty, don't you know me?"

"Know ye," cries Betty, setting down the can and staring at the questioner in the greatest astonishment. "Now, bless my laife, who is it? Not Muster Trevan'on—Muster John, as I used to call ye? Why, Lor' bless ye," seizing both his hands, "wherever have ye been this lang time?"

"Oh, I've been in Australia," says Trevanion. "But, Betty, I've just been home and the house is all shut up. Where has my mother gone?"

His voice trembles in spite of himself as he makes the inquiry.

"Why, Muster John, haven't ye heard?" says Betty, doubtfully, and stops short, her face grown suddenly grave.

"Heard what? For Heaven's sake tell me what you mean!" cries Trevanion, an awful suspicion of the truth becoming stronger every moment.

"She's dead, my dear—she's dead," sobs old Betty, fairly breaking down. "She died five year ago last Easter. I helped to nurse her, and a blesseder angel never lived in this wicked world."

"Amen!" says the other, half under his breath.

"She'd been ailing like for a long time; she never really looked up after you'd gone, Muster John, and at last she was took sudden,

and knew she was going and sent for me. Her talk was all about ye at the last. 'My dear boy,' she was always saying; 'my dear boy,' and just before she went, poor soul, she called to me, and 'Betty,' she says, very wistful, 'I should like to have seen my dear son before I go,' and then she could say no more for a long time; but by-and-by she went on, 'If ever he should come back, I want you to give him a note from me,' and she told me where to find it, and I've got it at home," cries Betty, breaking down afresh.

Her listener looked as if he had been turned to stone. He silently followed the old woman as she walked on to her cottage; and when she gave him the letter, he took it and said no word, but strode off again.

So this was the end of it all! All his hopes were blighted in an instant; all that he cared for in life was gone from him. He stopped under the first lamp he came to and mechanically broke the seal of the letter. How well he knew that dear handwriting. Trevanion was quite alone; the street was deserted. He put the letter to his lips and read that last message of love and forgiveness.

It was not a long letter, and when he had read it through, he turned away from the light and burst into a flood of such tears as only come rarely in a lifetime. There was a postscript to the letter which spoke of Mrs. Trevanion's will and of the lawyer who held the document. But he hardly noticed that; he felt that he had only one duty to perform.

He walked up to the churchyard that overlooked the harbour. Just at the top of the hill, as he opened the little creaking gate, the moon, which had now risen, shone out from behind a cloud and lit up the old church and the little cluster of stones grouped around it. Trevanion knew many of the names that were written there; he used to read the inscriptions when he was a boy. Here was the corner one, a type of many there: "Thomas Jones, mariner, of this parish, drowned at sea," on such a date. How carelessly he had been used to glance at these records. They struck him now with a peculiar pathos.

Trevanion knew the position of his father's grave, and he walked, trembling, up to where the weeping ash cast its shadow, faint in the moonlight, on to the turf. A new stone had been erected there. By the pale light he could just read the inscription: "Sacred to the memory of Mary Trevanion"—with a sentence from the oldest and best of books, which asked for comfort and help for the living until the meeting of the friends parted on earth.

The man fell on his knees beside the grave. And what better altar can be desired before which to kneel and ask forgiveness for a great wrong done?

A TELEGRAPHIC MISTAKE.

"REMEMBER, that if I telegraph the word 'Stability' it means that I have got this post, and then what you have to do is to sell our furniture, pack up, and follow me home to England as quick as steamers will carry you."

So spoke Roger Boxall, Professor of English language and literature at the Japanese University of Nakamouri, to his wife just one day before he started homewards on a short leave of absence. He wanted to see English relatives and friends, from whom he had been separated for more than ten years; and he also wished to discover what chance there might be of his obtaining a capital berth as vice-principal in a military academy in England, which he had heard was soon to fall vacant.

"Oh, how I hope you *will* get it!" exclaimed impetuous little Mrs. Boxall, clasping her hands excitedly. She was utterly sick of Japan. Besides, was not Mr. Boxall taking home her only boy, aged ten, to place him at a good English school. And the thought of the separation was horrible.

"It's more probable I shall *not* get it," he replied. "Anyhow, say over again the lesson I've been teaching you. What does 'stability' mean?"

"'Come—come at once.'"

"And what does 'Coromandel' mean?"

"'Coromandel?' Oh, let me think. 'Stay where you are; I am coming back.' But don't *let* it be 'Coromandel,' dear."

Roger Boxall, a calm masterful person, frowned at such trifling. He had floated into Japan on the crest of the great tidal wave of European enlightenment that had flooded the country some thirteen years before, and now he wanted to float out again. But his wife must not suppose that good English educational posts were to be had for the asking.

That same evening he gave her a final coaching in the telegraphic signals on which they had decided. He preferred to make her learn the words by heart rather than trust to writing them down on paper. Knowing his wife's flightiness, he felt that it was extremely probable that she would lose any piece of paper—especially one that she was bound to take particular care of—before he had been gone a fortnight. Whereas if he engraved the signals on her brain she could not avoid remembering them.

It was rather a sad parting; husband and wife had never been sundered before, and a voyage half round the globe was no laughing matter. But Roger kept up his wife's spirits as well as he could, until they were actually on the landing quay, and it was time for him

to cross the bridge on to the steamer's deck. Then poor little Mrs. Boxall broke down, and amid her sobbing whispered :

"Oh, Roger, dear, you *must* send me a wire—just *one* word—directly you arrive in England, to—to say you've really got there safely. Promise—promise me this."

He promised ; he felt it was weak—did not every word cost nearly a pound, to say nothing of addresses, in telegraphing from England to Japan ? but he also felt that it would be rather brutal not to humour his wife in her last request.

"What shall I wire ?" he asked.

"Say, 'I am safe and—and quite well, and so is Dick'" (Dick was the boy), "'and we hope to be in London very soon, and——'"

"Stop, stop. One word will have to mean all that, what is it to be ?"

He thought hard ; and thinking was difficult just then, with his wife sobbing hysterically, and their little daughter, who had also been brought to see him off, clinging round her mother's neck to comfort her.

The steamer's warning bell sounded briskly. Men were already laying hold of the bridge, ready to drag it back on to the quay.

"'Problem !'" he exclaimed triumphantly ; "that will be the word. Good-bye, darlings." And with a last embrace for wife and daughter he tore himself away.

"I hope to goodness," he was saying to himself an hour later, "that she will remember the word, and not confuse it with the others."

There was no need for anxiety on this point, for she recollected it perfectly. So when, a month and a half later, she received a telegram which contained the single word "Problem," she knew quite well that her husband and boy had arrived safely, and rejoiced accordingly.

Unfortunately the strain of recoliection connected with this last signal, weakened the effect of the lesson which Mr. Boxall had so industriously imparted the day before he set out. It was a week or so afterwards when there was presented to her another telegraphic form, whereon was inscribed "Coromandel"—that and nothing more. A sudden tremor seized her lest the meaning of the shibboleth might have deserted her brain. But only for a moment. Then she felt almost—yes, quite certain of what "Coromandel" signified.

Still, just to confirm her own view and make assurance doubly sure, she went off to consult a lady friend—wife of an English missionary resident at Nakamouri.

"Oh, it's as clear as daylight," concluded this quick-witted matronly woman after half a minute of thought ; "you are quite right. 'Coro mandel' must mean 'Come,' and 'Stability' means 'Stay'—don't the initials prove it ? Your husband of course chose those words for that very reason."

Mrs. Boxall had not noticed the initials before. Now she felt quite convinced, and began the work of packing and arranging for

the sale of the furniture with the lightest of light hearts. It so happened that the missionary's wife was also going to England on private and domestic business, but not for two months' time; and as Mrs. Boxall's little girl was finishing a course of lessons which her father had particularly insisted on her not missing, it was decided that she should stay in Japan for those two months and then come home to England with her mother's friend, who had kindly volunteered to look after her. Mrs. Boxall herself had already written to her husband, telling him of what she was doing, and when he might expect her; and so, within three weeks of receiving the fateful "Coromandel" message, she had embarked and was on her way to England, filled with delightful anticipations.

Somewhere on the Indian Ocean her steamer, homeward bound, must have crossed that bearing her husband back to Japan.

Just before he left London, on his last visit to his mother-in-law in Kensington, she had said to him with an anxious sigh—she habitually looked at the gloomiest side of things owing to an absurdly weak heart:

"Mind and send Jane home soon for a change; I feel sure she needs it." Jane being Mrs. Boxall.

"Ah," he had replied, willing to give Jane's mother the comfort of feeling that there was at all events a remote chance of welcoming her daughter again ere long: "I daresay that you will see her here sooner than you expect."

And she *did* arrive sooner than anybody expected. She had half-hoped that her husband would meet her at Paris. She had left the steamer in the Mediterranean in order to get the quicker to London, and when he failed to do so, she felt certain that at any rate he would be at Charing Cross, as she had telegraphed to him from Dover. But at Charing Cross there was no Mr. Boxall. Not a soul that she knew. And her follow-travellers from the far East were all being greeted on the platform by hosts of demonstrative relatives and friends, which made her feel still more desolate. What could be the explanation? In a fever and a four-wheeler she drove straight to Kensington, leaving her luggage at the station, and suddenly appeared in her mother's drawing-room, nearly precipitating one of that elderly lady's recurrent heart seizures.

"Where is Roger?" she burst out at once, without waiting to sit down or even offering a daughterly salute.

After a few gasps of mingled astonishment, pleasure, and dismay, Mr. Boxall's mother-in-law was able to explain that he had left for Japan precisely a month before.

"'Coromandel!'" screamed her daughter, and went off into hysterics. It was quite ten minutes before she even partially recovered. "I sent him a letter!" she at length was able to articulate. "It *told* him I was coming!"

"I know you did, my dear," replied the old lady. "I noticed

your handwriting. It came some time after he had set off. I was quite sorry you had wasted the stamp. And of course I sent it back to Na—to that outlandish Japanese place you live in."

A little later, and Mrs. Boxall's mother was gloomily explaining to her daughter that in *her* opinion it was all a plot on Roger's part to decoy her home for some reason of his own, a theory which his wife indignantly repudiated.

"It's all very well your saying he didn't intend it, but why did he tell me just before he left, 'You may see her home sooner than you expect?' Those were his very words."

Mrs. Boxall was a little staggered.

"Oh," she said after a minute's thought, "he *did* expect no doubt that we should both be in England before long, because he is tired of his work out there and means coming home soon anyhow. It is all my fault. I see it now. 'Coromandel' meant 'Stay where you are,' without a doubt."

"'Coromandel?'" repeated the old lady, mystified. "You have used that expression before, my dear. Is it Japanese for something?"

"Yes, it's Japanese for making an idiot of oneself," Mrs. Boxall replied. "And 'Stability' meant 'Come at once!' What a horrible chapter of blunders!"

"'Stability!'" echoed her mother. "My dear, have a glass of our sherry. You must be wandering a little."

"I have wandered a great deal," groaned the daughter: "do you mean to say there is no letter—nothing for me?"

"Yes, yes, my dear. I was forgetting. A telegram came for you two days ago, and I opened it. I could not understand what it meant, or why it had been sent here." She produced from her desk the despatch, which bore on it the mystic words "Belshazzar. Dixon's Code." It had come all the way from Japan.

In about an hour's time Mrs. Boxall had leaped out of a cab at Dixon's City Office, and demanded to see the Code.

"Belshazzar" meant—"I cannot understand your conduct. Wire explanation at once."

Mrs. Boxall accordingly purchased a rather expensive Code-book, sold at the office, and went back to her mother's with it. When there she hunted up the phrase which most nearly conveyed the meaning—"All a mistake. Expect me to return by next steamer. I will write full particulars." And when she had sent it off she found that it had cost her nearly three guineas. What would her husband say to her when next she saw him? Then he had not obtained the coveted appointment after all! And she had simply wasted the cost of her journey to Europe, and besides, had sold all the furniture of their Japanese home! She hardly dared to think of what she had done, and to drown thought, as well as from other and more motherly motives, she spent the afternoon in a hurried visit to her boy at the boarding-school where his father had just left him.

Some five or six days after she had really left Kensington on her melancholy return journey to the hateful East, another telegraphic message arrived at her mother's house. It was from Mr. Boxall to Mrs. Boxall, and contained the one word "Bucephalus." How Mrs. Boxall's mother's heart fluttered at this new enigma! If she were fated to be disturbed by constant telegrams from the Antipodes, then she preferred to know what the messages were about. Her daughter, she meditated, must have got to Marseilles and beyond it by this time —she was going out by a cheap French line—so obviously, the best course seemed to be to forward the telegram to Suez, there to await the arrival of the steamer. And in this way "Bucephalus" was sent prancing back along the wires.

Unfortunately, when Mrs. Boxall received him at Suez, she could not fit him with any harness. In other words she had left Dixon's Code-book behind her in London, and there was no copy on board, neither had she time to land and try to obtain sight of one. She was compelled to voyage onward to Japan with the mystery unsolved.

Arrived at Nakamouri, it was delightful to behold on the quay a great friend of her husband's, another English Professor at the University; a Mr. Wildman. Beyond a doubt he had been sent by her husband to welcome her on landing! In a few brief minutes she would see Roger himself again! She sprang lightly across the bridge, leaped on to the quay, and the next moment was shaking hands briskly with the professor, who looked both pleased and unfeignedly astonished to see her.

"How good of you to meet me! My husband—is he busy? Why has *he* not come?" A sudden unhappy thought had occurred to her—her husband might be ill!

Mr. Wildman saw the tears in her eyes, and began to be seriously disturbed at the situation.

"Your husband! My dear Mrs. Boxall, what do you mean? Is it possible you do not know—you have not heard?"

"Not *dead?*" she exclaimed hysterically.

"Oh dear no! Nothing of the sort. He is quite well, I believe. At least he was when he started."

"Started!" she half screamed; "started! Where to?"

"Oh, really, my dear Mrs. Boxall, you must be calm. There must be some stupid mistake. It——"

"Where to—where to?" she screamed in his ear, so loudly that he began to wish that he had been anywhere else than on Nakamouri Landing Quay at that precise moment. In sheer desperation he blurted out:

"To England. He sent a telegram——"

But poor Mrs. Boxall, exclaiming "Bucephalus!" had fainted on his arm.

An hour later she was sitting in the Quay Superintendent's little gimcrack bonnet-box that served as a house, sipping cold brandy and

water, somewhat more composed. Mr. Wildman was at her side. He thought he might now complete his sentence.

"He sent a telegram to you in London. Did you not get it?"

"He sent me two. One was forwarded to Suez."

"The last was to tell you that he was coming home again."

"Ah, 'Bucephalus!' I see it all now."

"Home again with your little girl."

"But why? He has not got that appointment. Then what induced him to leave?"

"He was tired of the life here, I think. Then he was rather—er—shocked to find that you were not here yourself, and that he had—er—no home, and—er—in fact, no furniture. He felt sure he should be able to get something to do in England. Of course he expected to find *you* there."

"It is too dreadful!" she sobbed. "And my girl—was *she* well?"

"Oh, quite; except her eyesight. It had gone a little wrong, and Boxall wanted to get the best London advice. That was another thing that took him home."

It was another blow to little Mrs. Boxall, too. She went to stay with the missionary's wife, who comforted her by telling her that all that she had to do was to write a good long letter to her husband, saying what she had done, and why, and telling him that she purposed returning at once to join him.

"And I should go back the other way—across America," advised her friend. "Then you will be able to say you have been right round the world."

"But I don't care about going round the world," she answered; "I wish there were no world to go round. I wish I could go straight through the middle and get to London in a week. Here am I in Japan and my family in England! I don't believe that I shall ever see them again."

"Oh, nonsense! You must try and see the humorous side of it, It's like a game of hide-and-seek all over the globe. Or that game of 'Post' we used to play at in the nursery. When 'General post' was called out, everybody changed places with everybody else. One corner of the room was Constantinople, and another was Calcutta, and you rushed across."

"I wish it were only a room between *us*," sighed Mrs. Boxall.

She took her friend's advice, however, and wrote to her husband, explaining everything. She told him exactly by what steamer, on what day she would leave, and added—"Before you receive this, I hope to be well on my way home, for the last time. I am telegraphing to say I am coming."

She *did* telegraph, one word only, got from Dixon's Code, which she knew her husband used. And leaving word with her friend that in case any telegram from England arrived for her, it was to be sent on

to meet her at Aden, she started in not such very bad spirits on what she trusted would be her final tour across the Indian Ocean.

Mr. Boxall's state of mind, meanwhile, was not enviable. He had fully expected that his "Bucephalus" telegram would have kept his wife in England, and his disgust at finding her flown back to Japan may be imagined.

However, it was fortunate that he had returned just then, because only two days after landing he heard of an excellent position as headmaster of a small but venerable grammar school in the North of England. In a week more he had sent in his testimonials, and soon after heard that he had been appointed. He at once telegraphed out to his wife in Japan. The missionary's wife did as she had promised and—Mrs. Boxall having left a fortnight before—forwarded the despatch to Aden, to await the steamer homeward bound.

Now on that steamer Mrs. Boxall was enjoying herself much more than she had expected to do, owing to the presence on board of a delightful Australian judge and his wife, who were on their way to England, and who proved most kind and sympathetic. The judge said that he had never heard of such an extraordinary game of cross purposes; his wife said that Mrs. Boxall must sit next to them at every meal, consult them about everything, and not mope.

At Aden the telegram was duly handed to her. It had two words this time,—"Eccentricity. Bohemia." The mere sight of the document filled her soul with trepidation, and she rushed off for advice to her good friends the Australian couple, who were fanning themselves vigorously under the awning, seated on deck chairs.

"Don't distress yourself at all," said the judge. "I'll see what the words mean for you. I have a Code-book in my portmanteau." And he marched off at once to unearth it. In a few minutes he came back.

"This is what it means," he said; "I'm afraid it's not exactly what you want: 'I am coming. Wait till I arrive.'—I've copied it out of the book, so there can be no mistake."

"Coming *where?* Arrive *where?*" asked Mrs. Boxall, breathlessly.

"Well—um—," stammered the judge, "it *looks* as if it must mean that your husband is coming out to where you were, that is to Japan. I'm afraid it must mean that. Clara, catch her!"

But his wife was too late, for Mrs. Boxall had already subsided on the deck.

If anything could have lessened the effect of this new shock, it would have been the sympathy lavished on her, first by the judge and his wife, and then by nearly everybody on board who heard the story.

"You must return instantly to Japan," said the judge. "It's the only course open to you. Your husband is going there and you'll probably arrive about the same time. It's lucky you haven't got further than Aden."

"But if he is going out, why should I not wait here him?" pleaded poor distraught Mrs. Boxall.

"He may be going out the other way—through America."

Finally she decided to do as the judge advised. But first of all she wrote her mother a long letter, in which she declared she was certain she would never see her husband again. The judge's wife had promised to visit Kensington and call upon that lady directly she arrived in London. With an inexpressibly heavy heart Mrs. Boxall left the steamer, stayed two days at a baking hotel at Aden, and then caught a P. and O. steamer to Hong-Kong, whence she could get a passage to Japan.

Behold her therefore about a month later, by an almost inconceivable series of misunderstandings, arrived once more at the port of Nakamouri—which she had twice already abandoned, as she thought, for good.

No kindly professor loomed on the quay. The rain descended in sheets. She drove to the missionary's house, only to find that his wife had left for Europe. She needed the face of a friend, and she drove on at once to Professor Wildman's abode, and asked to see him, though he was a bachelor. Necessity knows no proprieties.

Astonishment and consternation are poor words to express the feelings with which the professor beheld Mrs. Boxall once again.

"But—but," he said, without waiting to shake hands, "did you not get the telegram that was sent on to Aden? Mrs. Carter, old Carter's wife, you know, distinctly told me she had forwarded it."

"Yes—and it meant that my husband was coming out to Japan."

"No—it meant that you were to join him in England."

"Oh—Bohemia!" was all that Mrs. Boxall could ejaculate before fainting dead away, to Mr. Wildman's inexpressible disgust.

The first words she uttered when she came-to were:

"But the judge looked it up in the code himself."

"What judge?" asked Mr. Wildman. "Whoever he was he made a complete mistake."

An awful idea flashed upon her brain. Could the judge and his wife have been deceiving her?

The professor had recovered from his first astonishment; the reaction had set in, and he had now relapsed into gloom.

"I've heard from your husband—a letter—he's a lucky fellow. He has a first-rate English berth now. Wish *I* had."

This was the first that Mrs. Boxall had heard of the appointment, and she was too utterly depressed to care to ask what it was. She drove off to an hotel, and decided on the very best course that she could possibly have adopted. She would not stir from where she was until she had had a letter from her husband, giving her full directions what to do and where to go. She would trust to enigmatic telegrams no longer.

The professor when he heard of this resolution strongly approved.

"It's like a man losing a dog in the street," he remarked. "The best way to find it is not to go hunting for it, but to stay where he is

Sooner or later the dog comes back. And sooner or later you will have a letter from Boxall."

It was later rather than sooner, but it came at length, in response to one sent home by his distracted wife. When it came, it cheered her wonderfully. She expected it to be filled with reproaches for all the money she had spent. On the contrary it expressed the greatest sorrow for her misfortunes: what blame there was he reserved for himself.

"Those friends you made on the ship," he wrote, "the Australian judge and his wife, called on me and explained the whole thing. The words I telegraphed, 'Eccentricity, Bohemia,' mean in Dixon's Code 'I have got appointment; come at once.' Unfortunately the judge used Tweedie's Code instead, and forgot there was any other in existence; and it so happens that in Tweedie's Code the same words mean 'I am coming; wait till I arrive.' That was how you were sent back from Aden to Japan, when I was expecting you every day in England. I must say that the judge was deeply cut up about his mistake. He says he shall never forgive himself, and insists that he must pay all the extra expenses you have been put to. He is a brick, and is sending his two boys to my school. Even your mother calls him a 'most polite man, *outwardly*,' adding, 'too polite to be quite genuine, I fear.' The heart has been rather troublesome of late. I long to show you my school; such a delightful house, in a picturesque moorland country."

Then he went on to say that Mrs. Boxall might make herself quite easy about her boy and girl, who were perfectly well. He himself was not obliged to take up his appointment for four months longer. So he proposed, as some consolation after all their troubles, that they should meet half-way, and enjoy a pleasant trip home together. She must do exactly as he told her, and then they were sure to meet. He would start from Liverpool in a month's time from the despatch of his letter, for Aden, and she must leave Japan for the same place as soon as she received it. He added, "Aden will be so new to both of us."

"Oh, I shall see him again!" she exclaimed, with happy tears in her eyes. "But his writing has not improved: and I did not know any steamers for the Mediterranean started from Liverpool: but he is sure to judge best. And that about Aden being so new to us is evidently a joke. The hateful oven! I know it by heart!"

It was well that she had this transient gleam of happiness: that all the way back to Aden her heart was full of blissful expectations: because—— But it now becomes necessary to shift the scene to another steamer, ploughing the Atlantic waves between England and America, at a date three months after Mrs. Boxall's farewell to Japan.

Nobody who has followed that lady's strange adventures so far, will be surprised to hear that Mrs. Boxall was a passenger on this Atlantic steamship! It had come about thus. For three weary

weeks she had waited for her husband at Aden. But he came not In desperation she at length hurried on to England, again startling her mother almost into her grave by her sudden and violent appearance in the Kensington drawing-room.

Then it had all come out. Mr. Boxall wrote what is called a "running hand." And what his wife had read as instructions to meet him at Aden was in reality a pressing invitation to her to share a homeward journey from Ogden, on the American Pacific Railway, the alternative route to England for visitors from Japan.

"He said it was so near Salt Lake City, you know," explained her mother. "And he wanted to go and see the Mormons."

"The Mormons!" exclaimed his wife.

"Yes, my dear. It's very suspicious," replied her mother, whose heart did not admit of too favourable an estimate of anyone.

The only satisfaction that Mrs. Boxall did receive at Kensington, was in hearing from her mother something else that had been said by Mr. Boxall just before he started.

"If by chance I don't meet her at Ogden, I shall simply stay there till she comes," he had announced.

"Very well then," she thought. "My obvious duty is to go out to him there and bring him home. After all, it is only about half the distance to Japan. Only a quarter round the world *this* time," she said to herself with a deep sigh. And that was how she came to be on that Transatlantic steamer's deck in that month of October.

She longed for the ship to fly through the waves. If it deserved its name of greyhound, why did it mind head winds, which prevailed to an exasperating extent? To add to her legitimate grievances, when within one day's steam of New York a terrific gale was encountered.

It lasted the whole of one day, and blew itself out by nightfall. Then there followed two of the worst accompaniments of a sea voyage—a heavy swell and a thick fog.

The engines were reduced to half speed. Mrs. Boxall had only just gone to her cabin, late at night, when she was flung to the ground by what seemed an invisible hand stretched out to assail her.

A terrible crashing, rending noise was heard: then the rushing about of hasty footsteps on the deck above her, with shouting. She raced on deck, amid screaming lady passengers, to find that the boats were being lowered! The mist was lifting, and the black hull of another vessel could be seen close at hand, with its row of port-hole lights.

There had been a collison in mid-sea between two mighty liners, neither of which lived and floated for more than an hour after the shock. Fortunately there was no crowd of passengers, and before long every soul on the steamer that carried Mrs. Boxall had been got without accident into the boats.

On the other steamer all was hurry, for she was settling down fast. No more than four boat loads had been safely launched, when she

gave a plunge forward, then reeled sideways, and with lights still burning and funnels still smoking, disappeared hissing beneath the waves.

An awful momentary silence followed. Then shouts and screams were heard from the water on all sides. The boats already afloat rescued many a drowning sailor and passenger from death. That which carried Mrs. Boxall and her fortunes had already a dangerously large number on board, when a poor wretch was seen close by clinging to a spar, almost exhausted. The sailors looked at each other, and shook their heads.

"Oh, save him!" cried poor little Mrs. Boxall, wringing her hands.

"It must be the last, then!" said the mate, and pulled the man in over the gunwale. Mrs. Boxall caught one glimpse of his face, screamed, then swooned helplessly away.

It was her husband! Strengthless, half unconscious, numbed, and dripping—but still Mr. Boxall. He would not have been there had he not repented of his resolution to stay at Ogden for an indefinite time, and decided on hurrying home to England instead.

And to this day Mrs. Boxall can hardly be brought to look upon that collision as a disaster, although several persons perished in it, and it was a whole day before the boats were picked up: for without it, she solemnly believes that she would never have beheld her husband's countenance again.

H. F. Lester.

LONDON: PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED, STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

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The Argosy

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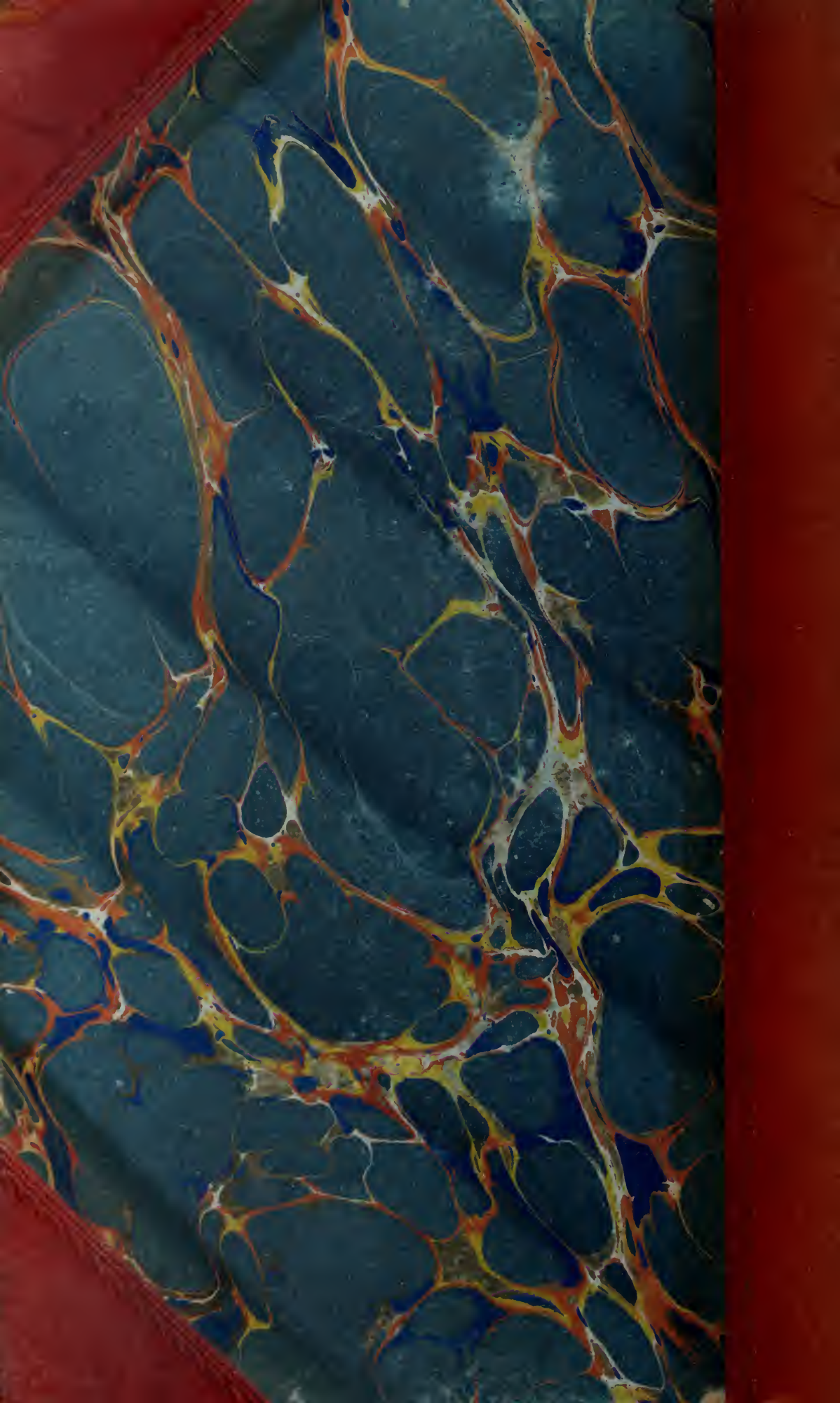
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